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**The Lake English Classics**

REVISED EDITION WITH HELPS TO STUDY

# AMERICAN SHORT STORIES

EDITED FOR SCHOOL USE

BY

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## PREFACE

As an important American social institution, the contemporary short story has more than a literary significance. The reading of short stories as they appear and will continue to appear in print week after week and month after month is a part of the living experience of a large group of our population. This commendable habit may be pursued with more benefit and more pleasure if the reader has some knowledge of the subjects, manners, and means of presentation which are practiced by short-story writers and which find favor with readers of our own day. This collection aims to present for study a selected group of short stories which represent the general practices of contemporary short-story writers. The stories are surrounded with a critical apparatus which provides not only a means for analyzing the single stories, but also a body of material which should be of service beyond the end of this textbook in helping to establish a critical attitude in the minds of the pupils and students toward the short stories which they will later read.

In subject-matter, the principle of choice held constantly in mind has been to gather a group of stories which present interesting and characteristic aspects of American life of our own time. The scenes and the people of these stories are drawn from the rapidly moving panorama of American civilization.

The selection is not offered as the "best" fourteen stories of the past ten years. "Best" is a bristlingly dogmatic

term, which will in its specific application almost always provoke an endless and unavailing argument. Time has not yet run far enough from the creation of the thousands of stories written in this decade for us to come to anything like a unanimous opinion in regard to what are or are likely later to be considered the "best" fourteen—or forty. No short story that was originally published before 1912 has been reprinted here. The stories of writers now publishing whose fame was secure before that date, as those of Mrs. Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, have been intentionally excluded, since the work of these authors more properly belongs to a generation which has passed. The authors represented in this collection are young enough, and yet their work is significant enough, for us to look forward to further expression of themselves in the form of the short story.

Though no attempt has been made in this book to provide instruction in the art of short-story writing, the collection may be used with profit in courses which aim to teach short-story composition. The stories in this volume are specimens of what is acceptable to magazine readers and to magazine editors, the final judges of what shall or shall not be published. A study of these stories from this point of view should be of service to those who are desirous of writing short fiction which will gain the form of the printed page.

The Introduction has been written with the stories which follow it directly in mind. All too frequently textbook introductions are essays unrelated to the matter which they are supposed to introduce. As a consequence, introductions are not always taken seriously either by teacher or by student. The general principles set down in this Introduction have been illustrated by specific references to the stories to be read. In the Notes and Questions placed

after each story frequent reference is made to the Introduction; hence a familiarity with the Introduction is necessary for a successful use of the Notes and Questions.

The Notes and Questions furnish, also, a running comment upon the particular aspects of American life each story presents, the relation of the form of the story to the traditional types of short stories, and suggested reading lists, which are short enough, it is hoped, to be of practical use. An Appendix supplies a bibliography of collections of contemporary short stories, a list of books dealing with the form and the history of the short story, and a group of one hundred selected volumes of American short stories published within the past ten years. Directions are also given for the use of current magazine fiction in connection with the study of the stories published in this volume.

Authors and publishers have been generous in extending permission to reprint the stories which make up this collection. At the beginning of each story, specific acknowledgment of the editor's indebtedness is gratefully recorded.

J. F. R.

Chapel Hill, N. C.

June 20, 1925





# CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE.....	iii
INTRODUCTION.....	ix
I. The Matter of the Short Story .....	ix
II. The Form of the Short Story .....	xiii
III. The Publication of the Short Story .....	xxii
HIS JOB..... <i>Grace Sartwell Mason</i> .....	1
Notes and Questions; Suggested Reading; Biographical Note.....	21
MR. DOWNEY SITS DOWN..... <i>Leonard H. Robbins</i> .....	23
Notes and Questions; Suggested Reading; Biographical Note.....	41
"THEY GRIND EXCEEDING SMALL"..... <i>Ben Ames Williams</i> .....	43
Notes and Questions; Suggested Reading; Biographical Note.....	58
DOWN ON THEIR KNEES..... <i>Wilbur Daniel Steele</i> .....	60
Notes and Questions; Suggested Reading; Biographical Note.....	88
MARY SMITH..... <i>Booth Tarkington</i> .....	90
Notes and Questions; Suggested Reading; Biographical Note.....	110
LONG, LONG AGO..... <i>Frederick Orin Bartlett</i> .....	112
Notes and Questions; Suggested Reading; Biographical Note.....	121
GOLD-MOUNTED GUNS..... <i>Frederic Rolert Buckley</i> ....	123
Notes and Questions; Suggested Reading; Biographical Note.....	132
"THE FAT OF THE LAND"..... <i>Anzia Yezierska</i> .....	134
Notes and Questions; Suggested Reading; Biographical Note.....	161

	Page
ACCORDING TO THE CODE..... <i>Irvin S. Cobb</i> .....	163
Notes and Questions; Suggested Reading; Biographical Note.....	199
COBBLER'S WAX..... <i>Achmed Abdullah</i> .....	202
Notes and Questions; Suggested Reading; Biographical Note.....	219
NOT WISELY BUT TOO WELL.. <i>Octavus Roy Cohen</i> .....	221
Notes and Questions; Suggested Reading; Biographical Note.....	249
THE NATURE OF AN OATH..... <i>Katherine Fullerton Gerould</i>	251
Notes and Questions; Suggested Reading; Biographical Note.....	275
ALL OR NOTHING..... <i>Charles Caldwell Dobie</i> ....	277
Notes and Questions; Suggested Reading; Biographical Note.....	304
FOOTFALLS..... <i>Wilbur Daniel Steele</i> .....	306
Notes and Questions; Suggested Reading; Biographical Note.....	332
QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW.....	334
APPENDIXES.....	335
A. One Hundred Books of Short Stories of Our Day...	335
I. Anthologies.....	335
II. Volumes by Individual Authors of Our Day...	335
III. Books on the Art and Technique of the Short Story.....	339
IV. Books on the History of the Short Story.....	340
B. Stories in Current Magazines.....	341

# INTRODUCTION

## I. THE MATTER OF THE SHORT STORY

The short story usually draws its situation from the life of its own day. On account of its brevity and compactness of form, the short story does not have the opportunity of painting a wide background of times or of social conditions altogether unfamiliar to its readers. It must rely much upon suggestions which, though they broaden, at least touch the reader's experiences. The matter of the short story is generally life near at hand.

When we are limited in the treatment of character description and character analysis, as we are in the making of a short story, we may reveal much about the people in our story merely by placing them in a well-defined locality or in some significant social position or occupation. The surroundings in which people live have much to do with their actions and their attitudes toward life. In the making of character many forces play a part; climate, race, isolation, riches or poverty, toil or leisure—all contribute toward the fixing of character and disposition.

Certain backgrounds immediately suggest certain traits of character. For this reason short-story writers have been quick to seize upon locality and living conditions as a help toward character portrayal. In the American short story, the conditions of our life—geographic, social, and industrial—have found a wider and fuller representation than in any other form of our writing.

More than half a century ago, shortly after the Civil War, the short story was well on its way to its present position of being the most popular form of literature in

America. At that time the nation was swayed by an intense national consciousness. It was intent upon learning what America was. It set out to discover itself anew. On account of the temporary separation of North and South during the period of the Civil War and on account of the rapidly moving Western frontier, men were not well informed as to how their distant neighbors lived. Interesting geographical and social conditions abounded. The quick and ready means of travel and communication which we have familiarly at hand for informing ourselves about the country as a whole did not then exist. It was thus easy for large sections of the nation to remain isolated from the rest. Their special characteristics made them interesting to other sections of the country.

For several decades after 1870, when Bret Harte's stories of the new life in California had set the popular type for the short story, the peculiar manners and customs of the out-of-the-way and far-flung sections of our country furnished the large theme for our short-story writers. The forms of American life most commonly represented then were drawn from the thinly populated West; from the nooks and crannies of the Appalachian Mountains; from the quaint and almost foreign parishes of Louisiana; from the plantations of the South; and from the isolated districts of New England.

In our own day, travel, reading, the spread of public education, and other leveling forces have obliterated most of the pronounced peculiarities of these out-of-the-way places and have reduced them to much more of a common plane of usualness. Geographically America has been growing toward sameness. Peculiarities of section are indeed to some degree still marked; but the differences have been so narrowed that they scarcely set apart large or important blocks of American life. There has been

developed an average national life spread broadly the country over. The hero in the tale of "Mr. Downey Sits Down," which you will read in this volume, could have gone through his experiences in any state in the Union, in any town large enough to support a department store and a daily newspaper. We have come upon the days of a more common exterior civilization; but this civilization is struggling with elements which were unknown in our national life two generations ago.

The short story of today has been true to its practice of changing quickly to represent altered social and economic conditions. As raw conditions of life in the West, which used to be called the "Wild West," have disappeared, the conventional Western story of a generation ago, with its cowboys and lonely ranches, its desperadoes and bustling mining camps, scarcely ever makes its appearance in the work of the story-tellers of our day. As the South is being rapidly brought into the pattern of the whole nation, the typical Southern story of a few years ago, with the ex-slave faithful to his proud but fallen master, has gone from our fiction pages. This is as it should be. When the conditions of life change and literature continues to represent them as typical and real, literature is merely imitative. It is existing upon a tradition.

The life of our day is still, however, tremendously complex. We are confused by its vastness, by its hurry, by our efforts to adjust ourselves to new ideas and to sudden social changes brought about by economic and industrial growth. We are uncertain in regard to our racial make-up. We are still curious as to who and what we are. This life of ours, in all of its stirring symptoms, finds a full representation in the American short story of the present time. Our short story is attempting to give an answer to our curiosity by presenting a large cross-section of American culture, or

a reflection of the multiform life of America; and this it is doing, on the whole, with vitality and faithfulness; with truthfulness to life and an honest setting down of character as the author perceives it.

From the pages of the hundreds of short stories which appear annually in our magazines, we may well make up a catalogue of our institutions, our beliefs, our prejudices, our likes, our virtues, our faults. In the mass of these stories we may find represented almost every locality, almost every social condition, almost everything good, almost everything bad among us. Here we may find pictured the hard struggle for existence in the modernly developed industrial world and its offspring, the big city; the life of big-business and of the corner grocery; the quieter ways in which the greater part of the nation leads its existence in the small town and on the farm. The unusual type of character whom the short-story writer zealously seeks is frequently drawn from among the strangers within our gates, the newer stocks of our civilization, with their bewilderment at the conditions of life which greet them here. The older stocks, too—more secure socially and financially—are presented, with their problems refined above the concerns of bread and butter. All these types are confused into the mass, which, despite peculiar individual or group differences, makes up America—this confident, vigorous, unfinished nation of ours. One of the common grounds upon which this diversity solidly stands is suggested by the single consideration of the common language in which the fourteen stories of this volume are told. The many varieties of our tongue which are spoken by the many sorts of people pictured in these stories differ greatly, and yet it is remarkable that this language can be spoken in so many forms and by such diverse groups and remain essentially the same language.



## II. THE FORM OF THE SHORT STORY

In intention the short story of today remains what the short story of yesterday was. It has been affected in recent years by an enormous increase in production and in the number of readers and by its attempt to portray a wider and more varied life; but its intention—the representation of human life in conflict and struggle—is unchanged.

As a form of literary expression, the short story differs from a tale that is merely short. The short story has a definite aim and a plan of structure which a tale does not need for its telling. The old folk tales or a story which you may informally wish to tell someone usually begins at the beginning and proceeds in the order in which the events happened. There is no great attempt to make one happening in the series more important than another. You give no great amount of thought to the question whether you will include all the details or not. The scenes will probably follow one another in the order in which they happened. You may work without a plan and you may aim at no effect other than to get the story told. It is as if you should set out to build a house without the drawings and plans of an architect and as if you should use your building materials as they come to hand. By this method you may produce a house which will serve its purpose—it may be habitable; but it will not be a pleasing or satisfying structure, because it has not been skillfully imagined and constructed. An observer may wonder why you stopped building just where you did. He cannot see any compelling end to your house, since you had not planned one when you began. Your work was probably wasteful, too, because you did not select your material and did not discard what was unsuitable.

The short story has an architecture of its own as definite as that of building with wood and stone and cement. This does not mean, of course, that all short stories are made alike, any more than all houses are similar. There are, indeed, types of houses, as the Colonial, the bungalow, and the Gothic; and there are types of short stories, as the detective story, the story of character, and the local-color story. But behind all the types of houses and short stories lie certain principles which are capable of infinite variety in the hands of imaginative builders and writers.

Every work of art seeks to produce an impression. The skillfully constructed short story has a definite artistic intention. Its aim may be to create in you a response of awe, horror, pity, love, hate, sympathy, expectancy, humor, or any other of the emotions which have so large a part in our lives. It may direct its aims at your thoughts as distinguished from your feelings and present an idea for your consideration (the story with a purpose or theme), or it may combine these appeals.

It can easily be seen that the short-story writer, in order to accomplish this purpose most tellingly, should direct his whole effort toward a single dominating effect. Throughout the story he should be continually at the definite aim with which he has set out.

Since the short story is limited in its length (in practice it runs in number of words from about 2500 to about 12,500), the author has not the space at his command to do more than concern himself with the single impression he has determined to produce. He must practice economy in the number of persons he introduces into his narrative. He should select only the most telling details for describing the few characters he presents, and he should choose and arrange the incidents in close dependence one upon the other in the way which will make them count most in

exhibiting character and in setting forward the story. The short-story writer cannot, like the novelist and the author of long dramas, introduce us leisurely into the lives of his people. Like the one-act dramatist, he must begin his story at once. And he should conclude it with a finality that will make you feel that this particular situation is at an end and that, though the characters may live on for years after the story has been finished, you have no concern with the later events of their lives.

The number of persons who may successfully be introduced into a short story is, then, necessarily small. Rarely do more than five speaking characters appear. In this small group one character must stand out prominently from the others. At the opening of Rudyard Kipling's famous story "The Man Who Was," we are introduced to half a dozen men who are talking as they sit around a table. After we have finished reading the story, we cannot form a definite idea of any one of them except "the man who was" and the Russian, and even the Russian is so far in the shadow that we remember him only as a necessary figure in contrast to the dominating character of the story. In Anson Carr's renunciation at the end of "All or Nothing" (page 304) you will probably forget the Greek track-walker and Carr's socially ambitious wife, and have vividly before you only the main character.

Since the main character must continually occupy the stage in the short story, it is essential that you know him well. But time is lacking to portray the development of character within the limits of the short story. The character must be presented fully developed, ready for the special situation with which the story is concerned. Yet you must know enough about him to be convinced that he acts at the climax as a person of such a nature would be expected to act.

You will scarcely know a person well unless you are interested in him. The chief character must be individual enough or exceptional enough to catch the reader's interest at the start. There is scarcely room in the short story for the commonplace character. This does not mean to say that the dominant character should necessarily be strange or weird. The desire to present the exaggeratedly unusual type of character has led many short-story writers to draw people whom we know at once as false and unreal. The important consideration is that, though strange and perhaps mysterious, the short-story character should be convincingly real. And actual people have their faults, their sins, as well as their virtues. They are guided by their generous and by their selfish impulses. In their conflicting desires, they are shown fighting, doubting, dreaming, conquering, sinning, murdering, sacrificing themselves—exhibiting all the impulses, good and bad, which guide the feelings and acts of men.

In all these struggles, the dominant character should be so pictured as to arouse your sympathy and understanding, or to give you the pleasure of recognition; you should be impelled to say, "I know people just like that." It is the task of the writer to find the point of contact between character and reader. This feeling of human nearness will cause a story to be read and read again. Very few of us will pass indifferently by a fellow-being in distress. Very few of us will not resent the maiming of Cobbler's Wax, vagrant Chinaman that he is. Man is so sympathetic toward his kind that when once his interest in another human being has been aroused by a particular situation, he will not be satisfied until he learns the outcome of the circumstances.

It is without profit to argue the question whether character or plot is more important in the short story. Both

are necessary for the successful short story. Without a story, a plot, there is no short story. Characters must be seen in action before they will be accepted and understood. But plot without character is likely to be void of human meaning. You might have a harrowing and thrilling experience in a railroad wreck, but a recital of the adventure or accident would not be a short story unless some special circumstance connected with the wreck should be used to illustrate a trait of character, contradictory or affirmative of what we know about you.

Plot is merely the arrangement and complication of the series of actions that make up the story. The most essential element in the making of a plot is conflict or struggle. Man seldom knows himself—surely his friends do not know him—until he is brought face to face with a conflict; until a struggle of interests, desires, and principles brings out convincingly his traits of character. By the use of his highest qualities, he may win over the situation and overcome the opposed forces; or he may through defect of character or through his failure to be his better self go down to defeat. The conflict may be objective or subjective. In simple words, this means that the conflict represented may arise between one man and another over some object which each one desires; between a man and his surroundings; or between conflicting moral or social forces. Or the conflict may be between the forces or impulses residing within an individual—between his conscience and his inferior impulses; for example, between his sense of honesty and his desire to get rich at any cost. We may illustrate these statements by examples drawn from stories you will read in this book.

In "According to the Code" you will find that the story hangs upon the struggle between Quintus Q. Montjoy and Tobias Houser over a small elective office. Behind this

personal contest stands a conflict between the older and the newer social orders. Montjoy struggles to maintain his position in the community by relying upon the power of his family tradition. Houser fights the battle of self-made men who rely upon their own powers for success. Hanneh Breinch, in "The Fat of the Land," suddenly placed in a position of wealth, struggles against the stamp which a long life in the slums has placed upon her character. The chief character in "All or Nothing," on the other hand, has no problems of material existence to solve. He has a good position in his profession and money sufficient for his ordinary pleasures and comforts. But he is unable to avoid the conflict which stirs within him over the question whether he is morally justified in keeping possession of the money he has inherited.

The conflict produces a situation in which the character must choose between one or another line of action. After his choice has been made, his way to victory or downfall is clear. This point of choice, the highest pitch of the action, is called the climax of the story. We reach this critical, or climactic, situation through a series of stages in the action. These steps the story writer selects and arranges in the order which will most vividly involve the character. The short story has but one such situation, but it represents several scenes which produce this situation.

It is with the climax, the deciding point of the situation, that the short story is chiefly concerned. The situation is about to be decided when the story opens. It may, however, have been growing for a long time before this beginning. Hazen Kinch's whole life had prepared him for the culmination of his career of greed that appears in "They Grind Exceeding Small." Yet the author does not begin his story of Hazen with his early career and trace the steps of his deterioration year by year until we



come to the most calamitous episode of his whole evil life. On the contrary, the author introduces us to Hazen the day before his tragic doom overtakes him.

The critical situation is usually not presented immediately at the opening of the story; but wherever it is presented, we see that all the important incidents have led up directly to this situation. Or, if characterization rather than plot is the author's chief purpose, he has made us sufficiently well acquainted with the dominant character to enable us to foretell his probable behavior in the critical situation.

In the simple and single plot of the short story, a subplot would be only confusing. Situations or incidents related merely for their own power to interest and amuse have no place in the compressed art of the short story. A swift and intense movement toward the climax is demanded.

It is economical and effective if the incidents related in a short story, which of necessity must be few, be striking and original. This does not mean to say that they shall be momentous of themselves, but momentous and significant for the characters concerned. Whether Angel Avellar in "Down on Their Knees" had or had not gone to the rescue of Peter Um Perna and surrendered to him, is of no great consequence in the large world; but in her own limited life it was the most important and significant thing she had done or possibly could do.

Not all successful short stories attain their aim, however, by the most rigid adherence to the direct and effective technique which has just been described. A writer is sometimes able to endow an appealing character with such lifelikeness that our sheer interest in him and his affairs sweeps us beyond a criticism or consciousness of the awkward and unartistic means which the author may have used to portray his character. Another writer may so awe or thrill

us with his plot that we fail to realize for the moment that his people are puppets in his hands and not human beings with responsibilities for their acts. Still another writer may construct a story perfect in its form, but the effect of the story may be altogether unconvincing. In the analysis and study of the short story one point is frequently lost sight of: the story may be of perfect workmanship, but at the same time it may show no glimmer of the soul and intelligence of the artist. The impression may be weakly presented because it had been only feebly felt by the writer. This is perhaps the greatest fault of the majority of contemporary short stories. If you have to choose, on the one hand, between the story which is perfect in form and weak in the arousing of an impression and, on the other hand, the story which is powerful in its genuine human appeal with an inferior technique, you will probably choose, and quite correctly, the latter story. The material with which the short-story writer works is human nature and human life, which he must realize deeply and honestly to merge into a narrative. When the form and the spirit meet in the same story, we gain the satisfaction of a perfect union.

The concise and compact structure of the short story which has been described is, after all, nothing more than the most effective means to accomplish the end for which the short-story writer sets out. Short fiction has not always used, nor does it always today employ, this economical method. The compressed form of the short story was not practiced until the early American writers, Irving, Poe, and Hawthorne, turned their attention to the improvement of the short narrative. Short narratives had been written in plenty ever since folk tales ceased generally to be told by word of mouth; but they were usually loose in form and for the most part either over abrupt or too leisurely in their

telling. You may see in some of Irving's tales his intention toward compactness and fitting order. Hawthorne gave to many of his tales the vivid dramatic form which is characteristic of the tense structure of the modern short story. It was Edgar Allan Poe who first defined the intention and made an exposition of the easiest means of reaching it. This he presented in a review of Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales*, published in 1842. Here Poe maintained that "a skillful literary artist" should strive to have his tale produce "a unique or single effect." "In the whole composition," he writes, "there should be no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not the one preëstablished design." Poe continued by asserting that this end could be gained most effectively by confining the narrative to a single dominant character represented in a single situation. This principle has been so generally accepted that it has dominated the large output of the short story which began to appear shortly after Poe's day, along with the great increase in the number of magazines and books published and the growing reading public. The principle has been modified in some particulars; other elements have come in as the short story has advanced in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; but Poe's pronouncement has remained the bedrock of the established technique of the short story.

The high mechanical perfection of the compact, concise form of the short story has, indeed, produced a hard and rigid mold. A conventional technique has been established. When a literary form becomes fixed or rigid, a revolt toward freedom almost always sets in. Signs of an attempt to break away from the established form appears in the stories of many recent writers, conspicuously in the writings of Sherwood Anderson and Waldo Frank. Their stories depend, in general, only slightly upon plot develop-

ment or climactic arrangement of scenes. They are more nearly character sketches or the representation of moods and attitudes of mind. The unconventionality of form is generally accompanied by an unconventionality in the author's views of life. Despite their sincerity of purpose and cleverness of style, these writers have not shattered the principles of the established form of the short story by the publication of their interesting experiments.

### III. THE PUBLICATION OF THE SHORT STORY

The basic appeal of American magazines to the reading public is short fiction. The vogue of the short story with us is so great that half a hundred or more magazines publish weekly or monthly several hundred short stories for millions of people to read. In the great mass of short stories called forth under present-day conditions of publishing, by far the larger number are of no lasting worth; they have no serious purpose; and they show little artistic skill. Their greatest lack is perhaps the want of a sincere attitude toward life on the part of the writers. The case could scarcely be otherwise. The commercial demand for short stories is so insistent that it cannot be met by the best sort of work; and the highest kind of fiction is not what we as readers always demand of our magazines. The magazine short story is, on the whole, what the reading public wants; and a great part of this public requires of its magazines, above all, amusement and entertainment for the passing of an otherwise dull hour. A large number of magazine readers prefer to follow types of characters with whom they are well acquainted through experiences with which they have become familiar in the stories they have already read.

For this reason you may sometimes hear expressed a sweeping condemnation of all short fiction published in

current magazines. "Magazine literature" serves with some people as a term of derision. But this is an unjust and an unintelligent opinion. Among the large number of indifferent and frequently bad stories published each year in our magazines, you may find many stories of high merit written by sincere and conscientious authors who possess skill in workmanship and expression, and who are intent upon honestly giving the impressions which the life of today is making upon them. For a long time short stories have received their first appearance in magazines and have only later been printed in book form. In a day not much earlier than ours the best short stories, too, were almost lost in a mass of inferior narratives. As a whole, American magazine short stories are superior to the output of a few generations ago.

The number of persons who today have the technical skill to write a well-made short story is remarkably large. An incentive to learn the practice is present in a measure in which it has never before appeared. The successful short-story writer of our day is highly paid for his work, for our widely circulating magazines with their pages of advertising matter can easily afford to purchase stories at high prices. This incentive is commendable; but it has, also, its harmful side. It raises the grave danger of making story writing a trade rather than the practice of an art, and tends to commercialize the production. It rears and supports the continuous manufacturers of fiction. Many a writer turns out more than he can produce at the standard of which he is capable, and many another author writes consciously to please what is guessed to be the average or below the average reader rather than to please himself or to satisfy his artistic conscience.

Many writers strive, above all, to please their readers, and editors buy stories which they have reason to believe

their readers will like. The readers to be pleased make up a large audience in the case of a "popular" magazine and a smaller group in the case of publications with a more restricted circulation. The short story addressed to the first group must have no unusual point of view. It presents a certain sameness and uniformity. Types of character easily become fixed. Imitation is almost certain to appear.

Present conditions of publication have had an influence, too, upon the length of the short story. The older, more conservative magazines usually carry from four to six short stories in each monthly issue. Of these, it is common to find that four are fairly long and two short. A four- to eight-thousand-word story is preferred. Sometimes evidence appears in these stories that they have been cut or shortened to fit the needs of space requirements. But this is a direction contrary to what more frequently happens in the case of the "popular magazine." The extended short story fits its purpose better than does the three- or four-thousand-word story. We have almost given up the practice of continuing a short story from one issue to another. We now have the newer practice of continuing a story from page to page in the same issue. After we have read the first installment in the fore part of the publication, we find the rest of the story continued on pages toward the back which display a large amount of advertising. Several stories may thus be begun in the first pages of an issue and all of them may be concluded near the end of the issue. It is advantageous, in such magazines, that the story should not give out too soon.

This mechanical arrangement invites a stretching of the story. It encourages diffuseness and wordiness. It is a tendency away from the economy and directness of the short story demanded by the traditional technique which has been described above. It has, furthermore, a bearing



upon the choice and arrangement of the incidents in the short story. Under the circumstances of publication, it is essential that the story be set going as quickly as possible. If the reader is to turn the leaves and follow through the maze of directions to continue on a following page, his interest must be caught, and the characters must be introduced and the initial incident related before the story is carried to a subordinate page.

The popularity of the long short story which has grown under the conditions of present-day magazine publication tends to confuse the distinction in intention and in material between the novel and the short story. There are stories well worth the telling which are not of sufficient human or moral importance to be developed into novels and which yet cannot be easily contained within the compact form of the terse short story. But the long short story runs the great risk of failing to produce the impression of vitality and vividness which is the particular appeal of the short story. The compact short story, with its direct method of rendering its material in a dramatic way, is more likely to take you out of yourself for the moment.

After all has been said, the short story cannot escape its limitations. Even though the narrative be told in many words, the scale of the short story is small. Its whole area is limited. It is compressed in time and in action. It is limited to one point of view. Its people are briefly seen—briefly known. The short story, at its best, takes advantage of its limitations by casting its aim swiftly and directly at a narrow segment of human experience. To be convincing, it must be dramatic and tense; for the more nearly we feel that its action is passing *now*, instantly, before our eyes, the more readily we shall accept the story as real.



## HIS JOB\*

GRACE SARTWELL MASON

Against an autumn sunset the steel skeleton of a twenty-story office building in process of construction stood out black and bizarre. It flung up its beams and girders like stern and yet airy music, orderly, miraculously strong, and delicately powerful. From the lower stories, where masons made their music of trowel and hammer, to the top, where steam-riveters rapped out their chorus like giant locusts in a summer field, the great building lived and breathed as if all those human energies that went to its making flowed warm through its steel veins.

In the west window of a woman's club next door, one of the members stood looking out at this building. Behind her at a tea table three other women sat talking. For some moments their conversation had had a plaintive if not an actually rebellious tone. They were discussing the relative advantages of a man's work and a woman's, and they had arrived at the conclusion that a man has much the best of it when it comes to a matter of the day's work.

"Take a man's work," said Mrs. Van Vechten, pouring herself a second cup of tea. "He chooses it; then he is allowed to go at it with absolute freedom. He isn't hampered by the dull, petty details of life that hamper us. He—"

"Details! My dear, there you are right," broke in Mrs. Bullen. Two men, first Mrs. Bullen's father and then her

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husband, had seen to it that neither the biting wind of adversity nor the bracing air of experience should ever touch her. "Details! Sometimes I feel as if I were smothered by them. Servants, and the house, and now these relief societies—"

She was in her turn interrupted by Cornelia Blair. Cornelia was a spinster with more freedom than most human beings ever attain, her father having worked himself to death to leave her well provided for. "The whole fault is the social system," she declared. "Because of it men have been able to take the really interesting work of the world for themselves. They've pushed the dull jobs off on to us."

"You're right, Cornelia," cried Mrs. Bullen. She really had nothing to say, but she hated not saying it. "I've always thought," she went on pensively, "that it would be so much easier just to go to an office in the morning and have nothing but business to think of. Don't you feel that way sometimes, Mrs. Trask?"

The woman in the west window turned. There was a quizzical gleam in her eyes as she looked at the other three. "The trouble with us women is we're blind and deaf," she said slowly. "We talk a lot about men's work and how they have the best of things in power and freedom, but does it occur to one of us that a man pays for power and freedom? Sometimes I think that not one of the women of our comfortable class would be willing to pay what our men pay for the power and freedom they get."

"What do they pay?" asked Mrs. Van Vechten, her lip curling.

Mrs. Trask turned back to the window. "There's something rather wonderful going on out here," she called. "I wish you'd all come and look."

Just outside the club window the steel-workers pursued

their dangerous task with leisurely and indifferent competence, while over their heads a great derrick served their needs with uncanny intelligence. It dropped its chain and picked a girder from the floor. As it rose into space two figures sprang astride either end of it. The long arm swung up and out; the two "bronco-busters of the sky" were black against the flame of the sunset. Someone shouted; the signalman pulled at his rope; the derrick-arm swung in a little with the girder teetering at the end of the chain. The most interesting moment of the steel man's job had come—when a girder was to be jockeyed into place. The iron arm swung the girder above two upright columns, lowered it, and the girder began to groove into place. It wedged a little. One of the men inched along, leaned against space, and wielded his bar. The women stared, for the moment taken out of themselves. Then, as the girder settled into place and the two men slid down the column to the floor, the spectators turned back to their tea table.

"Very interesting," murmured Mrs. Van Vechten; "but I hardly see how it concerns us."

A flame leaped in Mary Trask's face. "It's what we've just been talking about, one of men's jobs. I tell you, men are working miracles all the time that women never see. We envy them their power and freedom, but we seldom open our eyes to see what they pay for them. Look here, I'd like to tell you about an ordinary man and one of his jobs." She stopped and looked from Mrs. Bullen's perplexity to Cornelia Blair's superior smile, and her eyes came at last to Sally Van Vechten's rebellious frown. "I'm going to bore you, maybe," she laughed grimly. "But it will do you good to listen once in a while to something real."

She sat down and leaned her elbows on the table. "I said that he is an ordinary man," she began; "what I

meant is that he started in like the average, without any great amount of special training, without money, and without pull of any kind. He had good health, good stock back of him, an attractive personality, and two years at a technical school—those were his total assets. He was twenty when he came to New York to make a place for himself, and he had already got himself engaged to a girl back home. He had enough money to keep him for about three weeks, if he lived very economically. But that didn't prevent his feeling a heady exhilaration that day when he walked up Fifth Avenue for the first time and looked over his battlefield. He has told me often, with a chuckle at the audacity of it, how he picked out his employer. All day he walked about with his eyes open for contractors' signs. Whenever he came upon a building in the process of construction, he looked it over critically, and if he liked the look of the job, he made a note of the contractor's name and address in a little green book. For he was to be a builder—of big buildings, of course! And that night, when he turned out of the avenue to go to the cheap boarding house where he had sent his trunk, he told himself that he'd give himself five years to set up an office of his own within a block of Fifth Avenue.

"Next day he walked into the offices of Weil & Street—the first that headed the list in the little green book—asked to see Mr. Weil, and, strangely enough, got him, too. Even in those raw days Robert had a cheerful assurance tempered with rather a nice deference that often got him what he wanted from older men. When he left the offices of Weil & Street, he had been given a job in the estimating room, at a salary that would just keep him from starving. He grew lean and lost his country color that winter, but he was learning, learning all the time, not only in the office of Weil & Street, but at night school, where he studied

architecture. When he decided he had got all he could get out of the estimating and drawing rooms, he asked to be transferred to one of the jobs. They gave him the position of timekeeper on one of the contracts, at a slight advance in salary.

"A man can get as much or as little out of being timekeeper as he chooses. Robert got a lot out of it. He formulated that summer a working theory of the length of time it should take to finish every detail of a building. He talked with bricklayers, he timed them and watched them, until he knew how many bricks could be laid in an hour; and it was the same way with carpenters, fireproofers, painters, plasterers. He soaked in a thousand practical details of building; he picked out the best workman in each gang, watched him, talked with him, learned all he could of that man's particular trick; and it all went down in the little green book. For at the back of his head was always the thought of the time when he should use all this knowledge in his own business. Then one day when he had learned all he could learn from being timekeeper, he walked into Weil's office again and proposed that they make him one of the firm's superintendents of construction.

"Old Weil fairly stuttered with the surprise of this audacious proposition. He demanded to know what qualifications the young man could show for so important a position, and Robert told him about the year he had had with the country builder and the three summer vacations with the country surveyor — which made no impression whatever on Mr. Weil until Robert produced the little green book. Mr. Weil glanced at some of the figures in the book, snorted, looked hard at his ambitious timekeeper, who looked back at him with his keen young eyes and waited. When he left the office he had been promised a tryout on a small job near the offices, where, as old Weil



said, they could keep an eye on him. That night he wrote to the girl back home that she must get ready to marry him at a moment's notice."

Mrs. Trask leaned back in her chair and smiled with a touch of sadness. "The wonder of youth! I can see him writing that letter, exuberant, ambitious, his brain full of dreams and plans—and a very inadequate supper in his stomach. The place where he lived—he pointed it out to me once—was awful. No girl of Rob's class—back home his folks were 'nice'—would have stood that lodging-house for a night, would have eaten the food he did, or gone without the pleasures of life as he had gone without them for two years. But there, right at the beginning, is the difference between what a boy is willing to go through to get what he wants and what a girl would or could put up with. And along with a better position came a man's responsibility, which he shouldered alone.

"'I was horribly afraid I'd fall down on the job,' he told me long afterwards. 'And there wasn't a living soul I could turn to for help. The thing was up to me alone!'"

Mrs. Trask looked from Mrs. Bullen to Mrs. Van Vechten. "Mostly they fight alone," she said, as if she thought aloud. "That's one thing about men we don't always grasp—the business of existence is up to the average man alone. If he fails or gets into a tight place he has no one to fall back on, as a woman almost always has. Our men have a prejudice against taking their business difficulties home with them. I've a suspicion it's because we're so ignorant they'd have to do too much explaining! So in most cases they haven't even a sympathetic understanding to help them over the bad places. It was so with Robert even after he had married the girl back home and brought her to the city. His idea was to keep her from all worry and anxiety, and so, when he came home at night and she asked him if he

had had a good day, or if the work had gone well, he always replied cheerfully that things had gone about the same as usual, even though the day had been a particularly bad one. This was only at first, however. The girl happened to be the kind that likes to know things. One night, when she awakened to find him staring sleepless at the ceiling, the thought struck her that, after all, she knew nothing of his particular problems, and if they were partners in the business of living why shouldn't she be an intelligent member of the firm, even if only a silent one?

"So she began to read everything she could lay her hands on about the business of building construction, and very soon when she asked a question it was a fairly intelligent one, because it had some knowledge back of it. She didn't make the mistake of pestering him with questions before she had any groundwork of technical knowledge to build on, and I'm not sure that he ever guessed what she was up to, but I do know that gradually, as he found that he did not, for instance, have to draw a diagram and explain laboriously what a caisson was because she already knew a good deal about caissons, he fell into the habit of talking out to her a great many of the situations he would have to meet next day. Not that she offered her advice nor that he wanted it, but what helped was the fact of her sympathy—I should say her intelligent sympathy, for that is the only kind that can really help.

"So when his big chance came along she was ready to meet it with him. If he succeeded she would be all the better able to appreciate his success; and if he failed she would never blame him from ignorance. You must understand that his advance was no meteoric thing. He somehow, by dint of sitting up nights poring over blue prints and textbooks and by day using his wits and his eyes and his native shrewdness, managed to pull off with fair suc-

cess his first job as superintendent; was given other contracts to oversee; and gradually, through three years of hard work, learning, learning all the time, worked up to superintending some of the firm's important jobs. Then he struck out for himself."

Mrs. Trask turned to look out of the west window. "It sounds so easy," she mused, "'Struck out for himself.' But I think only a man can quite appreciate how much courage that takes. Probably, if the girl had not understood where he was trying to get to, he would have hesitated longer to give up his good, safe salary. But they talked it over; she understood the hazards of the game, and she was willing to take a chance. They had saved a tiny capital, and only a little over five years from the day he had come to New York he opened an office within a block of Fifth Avenue.

"I won't bore you with the details of the next two years, when he was getting together his organization, teaching himself the details of office work, stalking architects and owners for contracts. He acquired a slight stoop to his shoulders in those two years, and there were days when there was nothing left of his boyishness but the inextinguishable twinkle in his hazel eyes. There were times when it seemed to him as if he had put to sea in a rowboat; as if he could never make port; but after a while small contracts began to come in, and then came along the big opportunity. Up in a New England city a large bank building was to be built; one of the directors was a friend of Rob's father, and Rob was given a chance to put in an estimate. It meant so much to him that he would not let himself count on getting the contract. He did not even tell the partner at home that he had been asked to put in an estimate until one day he came tearing in to tell her that he had been given the job. It seemed too wonderful to be true. The future looked so dazzling that they were almost afraid to

contemplate it. Only something wildly extravagant would express their emotions; so they chartered a hansom cab and went gayly sailing uptown on the late afternoon tide of Fifth Avenue; and as they passed the building on which Robert had got his job as timekeeper he took off his hat to it, and she blew a kiss to it, and a dreary old clubman in a window next door brightened visibly!"

Mrs. Trask turned her face toward the steel skeleton springing up across the way like the magic beanstalk in the fairy-tale. "The things men have taught themselves to do!" she cried. "The endurance and skill, the inventiveness, the precision of science, the daring of human wits, the poetry and fire that go into the making of great buildings! We women walk in and out of them day after day, blindly—and this indifference is symbolical, I think, of the way we walk in and out of our men's lives. . . . I wish I could make you see that job of young Robert's so that you would feel in it what I do—the patience of men, the strain of the responsibility they carry night and day, the things life puts up to them, which they have to meet alone, the dogged endurance of them . . ."

Mrs. Trask leaned forward and traced a complicated diagram on the tablecloth with the point of a fork. "It was his first big job, you understand, and he had got it in competition with several older builders. From the first they were all watching him, and he knew it, which put a fine edge to his determination to put the job through with credit. To be sure, he was handicapped by lack of capital, but his past record had established his credit, and when the foundation work was begun it was a very hopeful young man that watched the first shovelful of earth taken out. But when they had gone down about twelve feet, with a trench for a retaining-wall, they discovered that the owners' boring plan was not a trustworthy representation of

conditions; the job was going to be a soft-ground proposition. Where, according to the owners' preliminary borings, he should have found firm sand with a normal amount of moisture, Rob discovered sand that was like saturated oatmeal, and beyond that quicksand and water. Water! Why, it was like a subterranean lake fed by a young river! With the pulsometer pumps working night and day they couldn't keep the water out of the test pier he had sunk. It bubbled in as cheerfully as if it had eternal springs behind it, and drove the men out of the pier in spite of every effort. Rob knew then what he was up against. But he still hoped that he could sink the foundations without compressed air, which would be an immense expense he had not figured on in his estimate, of course. So he devised a certain kind of concrete crib; the first one was driven—and when they got it down beneath quicksand and water about twenty-five feet, it hung up on a boulder! You see, below the stratum of sand like saturated oatmeal, below the water and quicksand, they had come upon something like a New England pasture, as thick with big boulders as a bun with currants! If he had spent weeks hunting for trouble, he couldn't have found more than was offered him right there. It was at this point that he went out and wired a big New York engineer, who happened to be a friend of his, to come up. In a day or two the engineer arrived, took a look at the job, and then advised Rob to quit.

“‘It's a nasty job,’ he told him. ‘It will swallow every penny of your profits and probably set you back a few thousand. It's one of the worst soft-ground propositions I ever looked over.’

“Well, that night young Robert went home with a sleep-walking expression in his eyes. He and the partner at home had moved up to Rockford, to be near the job while the foundation work was going on. The girl saw exactly

what he was up against and what he had to decide between.

“‘I could quit,’ he said that night, after the engineer had taken his train back to New York, ‘throw up the job, and the owners couldn’t hold me, because of their defective boring plans. But if I quit there’ll be twenty competitors to say I’ve bit off more than I can chew. And if I go on I lose money—probably go into the hole so deep I’ll be a long time getting out.’

“You see, where his estimates had covered only the expense of normal foundation work, he now found himself up against the most difficult conditions a builder can face. When the girl asked him if the owners would not make up the additional cost, he grinned ruefully. The owners were going to hold him to his original estimate; they knew that with his name to make he would hate to give up; and they were inclined to be almost as nasty as the job.

“‘Then you’ll have all this work and difficulty for nothing?’ the girl asked. ‘You may actually lose money on the job?’

“‘Looks that way,’ he admitted.

“‘Then why do you go on?’ she cried.

“His answer taught the girl a lot about the way a man looks at his job: ‘If I take up the cards I can’t be a quitter,’ he said. ‘It would hurt my record. And my record is the equivalent of credit and capital. I can’t afford to have any weak spots in it. I’ll take the gaff rather than have it said about me that I’ve lain down on a job. I’m going on with this thing to the end.’”

Little, shrewd, reminiscent lines gathered about Mrs. Trask’s eyes. “There’s something exhilarating about a good fight. I’ve always thought that if I couldn’t be a gunner I could get a lot of thrills out of just handing up the ammunition. . . . Well, Rob went on with the contract. With the first crib hung up on a bowlder and the water



coming in so fast they couldn't pump it out quickly enough to dynamite, he was driven to use compressed air, and that meant the hiring of a compressor, locks, shafting—a terribly costly business—as well as bringing up to the job a gang of the high-priced labor that works under air. But this was done, and the first crib for the foundation piers went down slowly, with the sand-hogs—men that work in the caissons—drilling and blasting their way week after week through that underground New England pasture. Then, below this boulder-strewn stratum, instead of the ledge they expected, they struck four feet of rotten rock, so porous that when air was put on it to force the water back great air bubbles blew up all through the lot, forcing the men out of the other caissons and trenches. But this was a mere dull detail, to be met by care and ingenuity like the others. And at last, forty feet below street level, they reached bedrock. Forty-six piers had to be driven to this ledge.

"Rob knew now exactly what kind of job was cut out for him. He knew he had not only the natural difficulties to overcome, but he was going to have to fight the owners for additional compensation. So one day he went into Boston and interviewed a famous old lawyer.

" 'Would you object,' he asked the lawyer, 'to taking a case against personal friends of yours, the owners of the Rockford bank building?'

" 'Not at all—and if you're right, I'll lick 'em! What's your case?'

"Rob told him the whole story. When he finished, the famous man refused to commit himself one way or the other; but he said that he would be in Rockford in a few days, and perhaps he'd look at Robert's little job. So one day, unannounced, the lawyer appeared. The compressor plant was hard at work forcing the water back into the



caissons, the pulsometer pumps were sucking up streams of water that flowed without ceasing into the settling tank and off into the city sewers, the men in the caissons were sending up buckets full of silt-like gruel. The lawyer watched operations for a few minutes, then he asked for the owners' boring plan. When he had examined this he grunted twice, twitched his lower lip humorously, and said: 'I'll pull you out of this. If the owners wanted a deep-water lighthouse they should have specified one—not a bank building.'

"So the battle of legal wits began. Before the building was done Joshua Kent had succeeded in making the owners meet part of the additional cost of the foundation, and Robert had developed an acumen that stood by him the rest of his life. But there was something for him in this job bigger than financial gain or loss. Week after week, as he overcame one difficulty after another, he was learning, learning, just as he had done at Weil & Street's. His hazel eyes grew keener, his face thinner. For the job began to develop every freak and whimsy possible to a growing building. The owner of the department store next door refused to permit access through his basement, and that added many hundred dollars to the cost of building the party wall; the fire and telephone companies were continually fussing around and demanding indemnity because their poles and hydrants got knocked out of plumb; the thousands of gallons of dirty water pumped from the job into the city sewers clogged them up, and the city sued for several thousand dollars' damages; one day the car-tracks in front of the lot settled, and valuable time was lost while the men shored them up; now and then the pulsometer engines broke down; the sand-hogs all got drunk and lost much time; an untimely frost spoiled a thousand dollars' worth of concrete one night. But the detail that required

the most handling was the psychological effect on Rob's sub-contractors. These men, observing the expensive preliminary operations, and knowing that Rob was losing money every day the foundation work lasted, began to ask one another if the young boss would be able to put the job through. If he failed, of course they who had signed up with him for various stages of the work would lose heavily. Panic began to spread among all the little army that goes to the making of a big building. The terra-cotta floor men, the steel men, electricians, and painters began to hang about the job with gloom in their eyes; they wore a path to the architect's door, and he, never having quite approved of so young a man being given the contract, did little to allay their apprehensions. Rob knew that if this kept up they'd hurt his credit, and so he promptly served notice on the architect that if his credit was impaired by false rumors he'd hold him responsible; and he gave each sub-contractor five minutes in which to make up his mind whether he wanted to quit or look cheerful. To a man they chose to stick by the job; so that detail was disposed of. In the meantime the sinking piers for one of the retaining-walls were giving trouble. One morning at daylight Rob's superintendent telephoned him to announce that the street was caving in and the buildings across the way were cracking. When Rob got there, he found the men standing about scared and helpless, while the plate-glass windows of the store opposite were cracking like pistons as the building settled. It appeared that when the trench for the south wall had gone down a certain distance, water began to rush in under the sheeting as if from an underground river, and, of course, undermined the street and the store opposite. The pumps were started like mad, two gangs were put at work, with the superintendent swearing, threatening, and pleading to make them dig faster, and at last concrete

was poured and the water stopped. That day Rob and his superintendent had neither breakfast nor lunch; but they had scarcely finished shoring up the threatened store when the owner of the store notified Rob that he would sue for damages, and the secretary of the Y. W. C. A. next door attempted to have the superintendent arrested for profanity. Rob said that when this happened he and his superintendent solemnly debated whether they should go and get drunk or start a fight with the sand-hogs; it did seem as if they were entitled to some emotional outlet, all the circumstances considered!

"After months of difficulties the foundation work was at last finished. I've forgotten to mention that there was some little difficulty with the eccentricities of the sub-basement floor. The wet clay ruined the first concrete poured, and little springs had a way of gushing up in the boiler room. Also, one night a concrete shell for the elevator pit completely disappeared—sank out of sight in the soft bottom. But by digging the trench again and jacking down the bottom and putting hay under the concrete, the floor was finished; and that detail was settled.

"The remainder of the job was by comparison uneventful. The things that happened were all more or less in the day's work, such as a carload of stone for the fourth story arriving when what the masons desperately needed was the carload for the second, and the carload for the third getting lost and being discovered after three days' search among the cripples<sup>1</sup> in a Buffalo freight-yard. And there was a strike of structural steel workers which snarled up everything for a while; and always, of course, there were the small obstacles and differences owners and architects are in the habit of hatching up to keep a builder from getting indifferent. But these things were what every

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1. *cripples*, damaged cars laid up for repairs.

builder encounters and expects. What Rob's wife could not reconcile herself to was the fact that all those days of hard work, all those days and nights of strain and responsibility, were all for nothing. Profits had long since been drowned in the foundation work; Robert would practically have to pay several thousand dollars for the privilege of putting up that building! When the girl could not keep back one wail over this detail, her husband looked at her in genuine surprise.

"'Why, it's been worth the money to me, what I've learned,' he said. 'I've got an education out of that old hoodoo that some men go through Tech and work twenty years without getting; I've learned a new wrinkle in every one of the building trades; I've learned men and I've learned law, and I've delivered the goods. It's been hell, but I wouldn't have missed it!'"

Mrs. Trask looked eagerly and a little wistfully at the three faces in front of her. Her own face was alight. "Don't you see—that's the way a real man looks at his work; but that man's wife would never have understood it if she hadn't been interested enough to watch his job. She saw him grow older and harder under that job; she saw him often haggard from the strain and sleeplessness because of a dozen intricate problems; but she never heard him complain and she never saw him any way but courageous and often boyishly gay when he'd got the best of some difficulty. And, furthermore, she knew that if she had been the kind of woman who is not interested in her husband's work he would have kept it to himself, as most American husbands do. If he had, she would have missed a chance to learn a lot of things that winter, and she probably wouldn't have known anything about the final chapter in the history of the job that the two of them had fallen into the habit of referring to as the White Elephant. They

had moved back to New York then, and the Rockford bank building was within two weeks of its completion, when at seven o'clock one morning their telephone rang. Rob answered it and his wife heard him say sharply, 'Well, what are you doing about it?' And then: 'Keep it up. I'll catch the next train.'

" 'The department store next to the Elephant is burning,' he told her. 'Fireproof? Well, I'm supposed to have built a fireproof building—but you never can tell.'

"His wife's next thought was of insurance, for she knew that Robert had to insure the building himself up to the time he turned it over to the owners. 'The insurance is all right?' she asked him.

"But she knew by the way he turned away from her that the worst of all their bad luck with the Elephant had happened, and she made him tell her. The insurance had lapsed about a week before. Rob had not renewed the policy, because its renewal would have meant adding several hundreds to his already serious deficit, and, as he put it, it seemed to him that everything that could happen to that job had already happened. But now the last stupendous, malicious catastrophe threatened him. Both of them knew when he said goodbye that morning and hurried out to catch his train that he was facing ruin. His wife begged him to let her go with him; at least she would be someone to talk to on that interminable journey; but he said that was absurd; and, anyway, he had a lot of thinking to do. So he started off alone.

"At the station, before he left, he tried to get the Rockford bank building on the telephone. He got Rockford and tried for five minutes to make a connection with his superintendent's telephone in the bank building, until the operator's voice came to him over the wire: 'I tell you, you can't get that building, mister. It's burning down!'

“‘How do you know?’ he besought her.

“‘I just went past there and I seen it,’ her voice came back at him.

“He got on the train. At first he felt nothing but a queer dizzy vacuum where his brain should have been; the landscape outside the windows jumbled together like a nightmare landscape thrown upon a moving-picture screen. For fifty miles he merely sat rigidly still, but in reality he was plunging down like a drowning man to the very bottom of despair. And then, like the drowning man, he began to come up to the surface again. The instinct for self-preservation stirred in him and broke the grip of that hypnotizing despair. At first slowly and painfully, but at last with quickening facility, he began to think, to plan. Stations went past; a man he knew spoke to him and then walked on, staring; but he was deaf and blind. He was planning for the future. Already he had plumbed, measured, and put behind him the fact of the fire; what he occupied himself with now was what he could save from the ashes to make a new start with. And he told me afterwards that actually, at the end of two hours of the liveliest thinking he had ever done in his life, he began to enjoy himself!

“His fighting blood began to tingle; his head steadied and grew cool; his mind reached out and examined every aspect of his stupendous failure, not to indulge himself in the weakness of regret, but to find out the surest and quickest way to get on his feet again. Figuring on the margins of time-tables, going over the contracts he had in hand, weighing every asset he possessed in the world, he worked out in minute detail a plan to save his credit and his future. When he got off the train at Boston, he was a man that had already begun life over again; he was a general that was about to make the first move in a long cam-



paign, every move and counter-move of which he carried in his brain. Even as he crossed the station he was rehearsing the speech he was going to make at the meeting of his creditors he intended to hold that afternoon. Then, as he hastened toward a telephone-booth, he ran into a newsboy. A headline caught his eye. He snatched at the paper, read the headlines, standing there in the middle of the room. And then he suddenly sat down on the nearest bench, weak and shaking.

“On the front page of the paper was a half-page picture of the Rockford bank building with the flames curling up against its west wall, and underneath it a caption that he read over and over before he could grasp what it meant to him. The White Elephant had not burned; in fact, at the last it had turned into a good elephant, for it had not only not burned, but it had stopped the progress of what threatened to be a very disastrous conflagration, according to a jubilant dispatch from Rockford. And Robert, reading these lines over and over, felt an amazing sort of indignant disappointment to think that now he would not have a chance to put to the test those plans he had so minutely worked out. He was in the position of a man that has gone through the painful process of readjusting his whole life; who has mentally met and conquered a catastrophe that fails to come off. He felt angry and cheated for a few minutes, until he regained his mental balance and saw how absurd he was, and then, feeling rather foolish and more than a little shaky, he caught a train and went up to Rockford.

“There he found out that the report had been right; beyond a few cracked wire-glass windows—for which, as one last painful detail, he had to pay—and a blackened side wall, the White Elephant was unharmed. The men putting the finishing touches to the inside had not lost an



hour's work. All that dreadful journey up from New York had been merely one last turn of the screw.

"Two weeks later he turned the Elephant over to the owners, finished, a good, workman-like job from roof to foundation-piers. He had lost money on it; for months he had worked overtime his courage, his ingenuity, his nerves, and his strength. But that did not matter. He had delivered the goods. I believe he treated himself to an afternoon off and went to a ball game; but that was all, for by this time other jobs were under way, a whole batch of new problems were waiting to be solved; in a week the Elephant was forgotten."

Mrs. Trask pushed back her chair and walked to the west window. A strange quiet had fallen upon the skyscraper now; the workmen had gone down the ladders, the steam riveters had ceased their tapping. Mrs. Trask opened the window and leaned out a little.

Behind her the three women at the tea table gathered up their furs in silence. Cornelia Blair looked relieved, and prepared to go on to dinner at another club. Mrs. Bullen avoided Mrs. Van Vechten's eye. In her rosy face faint lines had traced themselves, as if vaguely some new perceptiveness troubled her. She looked at her wrist-watch and rose from the table hastily.

"I must run along," she said. "I like to get home before John does. You going my way, Sally?"

Mrs. Van Vechten shook her head absently. There was a frown between her dark brows; but as she stood fastening her furs her eyes went to the west window, with an expression in them that was almost wistful. For an instant she looked as if she were going over to the window beside Mary Trask; then she gathered up her gloves and muff and went out without a word.

Mary Trask was unaware of her going. She had for-

gotten the room behind her and her friends at the tea table, as well as the other women drifting in from the adjoining room. She was contemplating, with her little, absent-minded smile, her husband's name on the builder's sign halfway up the unfinished skyscraper opposite.

"Good work, old Rob," she answered. Then her hand went up in a quaint gesture that was like a salute.

"To all good jobs and the men behind them!" she added.

### NOTES AND QUESTIONS

"His Job" was first published in *Scribner's Magazine*, April, 1920.

1. The experience of Robert, the hero of "His Job," is typical of incidents in the lives of many successful American men. Robert has the self-reliance, the pluck, and the grit that we consider the distinction of American youth. In older fiction the hero had obstacles to overcome quite different from those which Robert faced. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus struggled for ten years against the ill-will of the gods, who put every sort of difficulty in his way. In the Old English epic *Beowulf* the hero fought against monsters and a giant. Robert's fight is no less valiant, and to us it is much more real. With the same courage and determination which the older heroes showed, he makes his struggle on the battleground of the modern industrial and business world. The unknown boy succeeds in this struggle for a place in doing big things among the scenes of endeavor today. The wife of the young builder, who is just as much responsible for Robert's winning the fight as he is himself, also represents the ambition of many an American girl.

2. Notice the pains the author takes to convince you of the reality of the story by assembling a mass of details of the building trade. Why is the scene laid in a city?

3. At what point do the struggles of Robert actually start? Why did the author not begin her story here? After the introduction, the author has the narrative carried to a finish by one character. What advantages and what disadvantages does this

method of telling a story have? Who compose the audience? What is the occasion of Mrs. Trask's relating the early struggles of her husband? When did you first suspect that Mrs. Trask is the hero's wife? What effect did the narrative have upon Mrs. Trask's listeners?

4. Make a list of the difficulties Robert had to overcome in building the "White Elephant." What qualities of Robert's do you admire? What qualities of his wife do you like? What difference in attitude toward life is shown by Mrs. Trask and by the women to whom she tells the story?

*Suggested Reading*—"The Buckpasser" by Hugh McNair Kahler (in *Short Stories by Present-Day Authors*, Pence); "The Gay Old Dog" by Edna Ferber (in *Cheerful by Request*).

*Biographical Note*.—Mrs. Grace Sartwell Mason is a native of Port Allegheny, Pennsylvania, and now lives in New York City. She is a frequent contributor of short stories to *Scribner's Magazine*, *Everybody's Magazine*, *Munsey's Magazine*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*.

## MR. DOWNEY SITS DOWN\*

L. H. ROBBINS

### I

Jacob Downey waited in line at the meat-shop. A foot-sore little man was he. All day long, six days a week for twenty-two years, he had stood on his feet, trotted on them, climbed on them, in the hardware department of Wilbram, Prescott & Co., and still they would not toughen; still they would hurt; still to sustain his spirit after three o'clock he had to invoke a vision of slippers, a warm radiator, the *Evening Bee*, and the sympathy of Mrs. Downey and the youngsters. To the picture this evening he had added pork chops.

The woman next in line ahead of him named her meat. Said the butcher, with a side glance at the clock, "A crown roast takes quite a while, lady. Could I send it in the morning?"

No, the lady wished to see it prepared. Expressly for that purpose had she come out in the rain. Tomorrow she gave a luncheon.

"First come, first served," thought Jacob Downey, and bode his time in patience, feeling less pity for his aching feet than for Butcher Myers. Where was the charity in asking a hurried man at five minutes to six o'clock to frill up a roast that would not see the oven before noon next day?

Now, crown roasts are one thing to him who waits on fallen arches, and telephone calls are another. Scarcely

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\*Originally published in *Everybody's Magazine*. Reprinted by permission of the author.

had Downey's opening come to speak for pork chops cut medium, when off went the bell and off rushed Butcher Myers.

Sharply he warned the unknown that this was Myers's Meat-Shop. Blandly he smiled into the transmitter upon learning that his caller was Mrs. A. Lincoln Wilbram.

By the audience in front of the counter the following social intelligence was presently inferred:

That Mr. and Mrs. Wilbram had just returned from Florida; that they had enjoyed themselves ever so much; that they hoped Mr. Myers's little girl was better; that they were taking their meals at the Claredon pending the mobilization of their house-servants; that they expected to dine with the Mortimer Trevelyans this evening; that food for the dog may with propriety be brought home from a hotel, but not from the Mortimer Trevelyans'; that there was utterly nothing in the icebox for poor Mudge's supper; that Mudge was a chow dog purchased by a friend of Mr. Wilbram's in Hongkong at so much a pound, just as Mr. Myers purchased live fowls; that Mudge now existed, not to become chow, but to consume chow, and would feel grateful in his dog heart if Mr. Myers would, at this admittedly late hour, send him two pounds of bologna and a good bone; and that Mrs. Wilbram would consider herself under deep and lasting obligation to Mr. Myers for this act of kindness.

Mr. Myers assured Mrs. Wilbram that it would mean no trouble at all; he would send up the order as soon as his boy came back from delivering a beefsteak to the Mortimer Trevelyans.

He filled out a slip and stuck it on the hook.

"Now, Mr. Downey," he said briskly.

But Jacob Downey gave him one tremendous look and limped out of the shop.

## II

It was evening in the home of Miss Angelina Lance. Twenty-seven hours had passed since Jacob Downey's exasperated exit from Myers's Meat-Shop. The eyes of Miss Angelina were bright behind her not-unbecoming spectacles as she watched the face of the solemn young man in the Morris chair near the reading-lamp.

In his hand the solemn young man held three sheets of school composition-paper. As he read the pencil writing on page one he lost his gravity. Over page two he smiled broadly. At the end of the last page he said:

"D.K.T. couldn't have done better. May I show it to him?"

In the office of the *Ashland* (N. J.) *Bee* the solemn young man was known as Mr. Sloan. At Miss Lance's he was Sam. The mentioned D.K.T. conducted the celebrated "Bee-Stings" column on the editorial page of Mr. Sloan's journal, his levity being offset by the sobriety of Mr. Sloan, who was assistant city-editor.

On two evenings a week Mr. Sloan fled the cares of the Fourth Estate,<sup>1</sup> and became Sam in the soul-refreshing presence of Miss Angelina. He was by no means her only male admirer. In the Sixth Grade at the Hilldale Public School she had thirty others; among these Willie Downey, whose name appeared on every page of the composition Mr. Sloan had read.

With a host of other sixth-graders throughout the city Willie had striven that day for a prize of ten dollars in gold offered by the public-spirited A. Lincoln Wilbram, of Wilbram, Prescott & Co., for the best schoolboy essay on Moral Principles.

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1. *Fourth Estate*, the newspaper world. In Europe, before the time of newspapers, there were three estates—the clergy, the lords, and the commons, representing the three class divisions.



"Moral principles, gentlemen; that is what we need in Ashland. How many men do you know who stand up for their convictions—or have any to stand up for?"

If the head of a department store is a bit thunderous at times, think what a Jovian<sup>2</sup> position he occupies. In his cloud-girt, mahogany-paneled throne-room on the eighth floor he rules over a thousand mortals, down to the little Jacob Downeys in the basement, who, if they do not quite weep with delight when he gives them a smile, tremble, at least, at his frown. When a large body of popular opinion accords him greatness, were he not undemocratic to affect humility and speak small?

"I speak of common men," said Mr. Wilbram (this was at a Chamber of Commerce banquet); "of men whose living depends upon the pleasure of their superiors. How few there are with fearless eye!"

He scarcely heard the laughter from a group of building contractors at a side table, who had not seen a servile eye among their workmen in many moons; for a worthy project had popped into his mind at that instant. How was the moral backbone of our yeomanry to be stiffened save through education? Why not a prize contest to stimulate the interest of the rising generation in this obsolete subject?

In many an Ashland home where bicycles, roller-skates, wireless outfits, and other such extravagances were strongly desired, the question had since been asked: "Pa, what are Moral Principles?" While some of the resulting essays indicated a haziness in paternal minds, not so the production that Mr. Sloan read in Miss Lance's parlor.

"But I couldn't let you print it," said Miss Angelina. "I wouldn't have Willie shamed for anything. He may be weak in grammar, but he is captain of every athletic team

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2. *Jovian*, ruling or important, like Jove.

in the school. He has told me in confidence that he means to spend the prize money for a genuine horse-hide catching-mitt."

"If I cross out his name, or give him a *nom de plume*?"<sup>3</sup>  
On that condition Miss Lance consented.

### III

At the office next morning Sloan found the essay in his pocket and looked around the city-room for D.K.T. The staff poet-clown was no daylight saver; professing to burn the midnight oil in the interest of his employer, he seldom drifted in before half-past nine.

"See me. S.S.," wrote Sloan, and dropped Willie's manuscript on D.K.T.'s desk.

Then he jumped and gasped, and copy-readers and office-boys jumped and gasped, and the religious editor dashed frantically for the stairs, outrunning the entire staff down the hall, though he had farther to go than any other man or woman there. A huge, heart-stopping shock had rocked the building, set the windows to clattering and the lights to swinging, and brought down in a cloud the accumulated dust of a quarter-century.

Within two minutes by the clock Sloan and five reporters had started for the scene of the Rutland disaster, fifteen miles away, where enough giant powder had gone up in one petrific blast to raze Gibraltar. A thriving town lay in ruins; hundreds of families were homeless; a steamship was sunk at her dock; a passenger train blown from the rails.

At eleven o'clock on the night following that pitiful day Sloan journeyed homeward to Ashland in an interurban

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3. *nom de plume*, pen-name; a name assumed by a writer to conceal his identity.

trolley-car in company with a crowd of refugees. A copy of the last edition of the *Bee* comforted his weary soul.

The first page was a triumph. Count on the office to back up its men in the field! There was the whole story, the whole horror and heartbreak, finely displayed. There were his photographs of the wreckage; there, in a "box,"<sup>4</sup> was his interview with the superintendent of the Rutland Company; there was a map of the devastated area. Perhaps someone had found time even to do an editorial; in that case the clean-up would be complete.

Opening the paper to the sixth page, he groaned; for the first thing that caught his eye was Willie Downey's essay, at the top of D.K.T.'s column, with Willie's name below the headline.

## MOREL PRINSAPLES

By Willie Downey

Age 12

Morel Prinsaples is when you have a nerve to stick up for some thing.

Like last night my Father went in Mires meet shop & stood in line 15 or twenty min. wateing his tirn & when his tirn come he says to mr. Mires Ile have 6 porc chops.

at that inst. the telaphone wrang & mr. Mires slidd for it like it was 2nd base.

Hold on Mires says Pa, who got here 1st, me or that bell wringer.

Igscuse me just 1 min. says Mr. mires.

No I be ding if Ile igscuse you says Pa, 1st come 1st served is the rool of bizness all over."

But Mr mires wyped his hands on his apern & ansered the wring & it was mrs. Will Brum, she was going to eat out at a frends so she wanted 2 lbs, bolony & a dog bone.

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4. *box*, heavy rules or other typographical adornment surrounding a news item to give it prominence. Such items are usually printed in heavy type.

So then Pa give him hale columbus.

"Here I bin wateing  $\frac{1}{2}$  an our he said, yet when some lazy lofer of a woman who has been reading a novvle or a sleep all after noon pphones you to rush her up some dog meet in youre Autto with gass 36 cts. & charge it to her acct. & may be you wont get your munny for three 4 munths, wy you run to wate on her while I stand & shovle my feet in youre saw dust like a ding mexican pea own or some thing.

What says Pa is there about a cusstamer who takes the trubble to come for his meet & pay cash for it & delivvers it him self that maiks him so Meen & Lo that he hass to be pushed one side for some body that has not got Gumpshun enoughf to order her dog bones before the rush our?

Do you think that people with a telapphone's munny is any better than mine, do you think becuase I walk in here on my hine leggs that I am a piker & a cheep skait, becuase if so I will bring along my telapphone contract nex time & show you & then may be you will reckonnize me as a free born amerrican who dont haff to traid where I haff to play 2nd fiddle to a chow pupp. Its agensnt my morel prinsaples says Pa."

With theas wirds he walks out in the rane althogh his feet hurt him clear down to washington St. to the nex meet store, but by that time they were all cloased up so we had prinsaples for supper insted of porc chops.

Pa says if he run a store & had a pphone & no body to anser it & do nothing else he would ring it's neck, becuase while the telapphone is the gratest blesing of the aige, but a pphone with out an opperater is like a ham ommalet with the ham let out. He says the reazon the Chane Stores have such a pull with the public is becuase the man behine the counter is not all the time Jilting you in the middle of your order & chacing off to be sweet to some sosciety dame with a dog 4 miles away.

Ma says she dont kno why we have a pphone any how becuase every time she is youseing it a woman butts in & jiggles the hook & says will you pleas hang up so I can call a Dr. & when Ma hangs up & then lissens in to see who is sick, wy this woman calls up a lady frend & they nock Ma back & 4th over the wyre for ours & sometimes they say I bet she is lissening in on us dont you.

So as I say let us all stick up for our Morel Prinsaples like my Father come what may.

## IV

Bright were Miss Angelina's eyes, but not with mirth. It was unspeakable, this thing that Mr. Sloan had done. Thrice before bedtime she called his lodgings. Mr. Sloan was not in.

Before the last call, she donned her wraps and went out to Plume Street. Courageously she pulled the bell at Number Nine. Willie's mother opened the door and cried, surprised, "Why! Miss Lance."

"Is Willie here? Have you seen the paper? Will you let me tell him how it happened, and how sorry I am?"

Willie was not receiving callers this evening. He had been sent to bed without supper. The explosion at Rutland had been as nothing, it seemed, to the outburst in the Downey home.

Slowly the extent of the harm dawned upon Miss Angelina.

"It was Mrs. A. Lincoln Wilbram wanted the dog bone," said Mrs. Downey, tearfully. "Everybody will recognize her; and what Mr. Wilbram will do to us we don't need to be told. Poor Jake is so upset he has gone out to roam in the dark. He couldn't stay in the house."

New jobs were scarce for men at his time of life, and with his feet. Dora and Jennie might have to leave high school.

"I'm sure you meant us no wrong, Miss Lance; I'm sure there was a mistake. But think how dreadful it is, after twenty-two years of having Mr. Wilbram's pay, then to turn around and backbite his wife like that, right out in print!"

Doubly troubled now, Miss Lance departed. Attracted by a quick gathering of loiterers in the avenue, she witnessed a controversy that might easily have become a police matter.

"You're a liar if you say you said all that to me!" shouted the burly Butcher Myers. "You never opened your head, you shrimp! Bawling me out in the papers and losing me my best customers! Whaddye mean?"

Back came the retort from Jacob Downey with the snarl of a little creature at bay.

"If I didn't say it to you then, you big lobster, I say it to you now. All that the paper says I said I say. What'll you do about it?"

"Hah! You!" Myers snapped his fingers in Downey's fiery face and turned away.

Miss Lance's path to the Hilldale School next morning took her past three post-boxes. Into the third she dropped a note that she had carried from home. Mr. Sloan would find her message exceedingly brief, although (or, perhaps, because) she had spent hours in composing it.

Dear Sir:

I regret to discover that you lack moral principles.

ANGELINA LANCE

Just before the last bell, the janitor brought in a prisoner for her custody. Willie Downey's head was bloody but unbowed;<sup>5</sup> three seventh-graders he had vanquished in one round. "They guyed me," said he. "They called me a Nawthor."

Morning prayer and song waited while teacher and pupil spoke earnestly of many things; while the teacher's eyes filled with tears, and the pupil's heart filled with high resolve to bring home the baseball championship of the Ashland Public School League and lay it at Miss Angelina's feet, or perish in the attempt.

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5. *bloody but unbowed*. See line 8 of W. E. Henley's poem "Invictus":

"My head is bloody but unbowed."

## V

The A. Lincoln Wilbram prize went to a small boy named Aaron Levinsky, whose English was ninety-nine percent pure. Little Aaron's essay was printed as the center-piece in Wilbram, Prescott & Co.'s page in the *Bee*; little Aaron invested his gold in thrift-stamps, and the tumult and the shouting died.<sup>6</sup>

Miss Angelina Lance sat alone every evening of the week. True, Mr. Sloan had tried to right the wrong; he had called Miss Angelina on the telephone, which he should have known was an inadequate thing to do; he had also sent a ten-dollar bank-note to Willie, in care of Miss Lance at the Hildale School, together with his warm felicitations upon Willie's success as a *litterateur*. Did Willie know that his fine first effort had been reprinted, with proper credit, in the great New York *Planet*?

True, too, the illustrious D.K.T. had written Miss Angelina an abject apology, most witty and poetic, taking all the blame to himself and more than exonerating his high-principled friend Mr. Sloan.

But the bank-note went back to its donor without even a rejection slip; and D.K.T.'s humor was fatal to his client's cause. Ghastly are they who jest in the shadow of tragedy. Mr. Sloan and D.K.T. did not know, of course; Miss Angelina had not thought it of any use to tell them of the sword which they had hung up by a thread above the heads of the Downeys.

As for Jacob Downey, he limped about amid his hardware in the basement at Wilbram, Prescott & Co.'s, careworn, haunted of eye, expecting the house to crash about his ears at any moment. One does not with impunity publish the wife of one's employer as a lazy loafer.

6. An adaptation of a line in Kipling's "Recessional": "The tumult and the shouting dies."



The A. Lincoln Wilbrams had servants again, and dined at home. To Mr. Wilbram said Mrs. Wilbram, one evening:

"It is the strangest thing. In the last month I've met scarcely a soul who hasn't asked me silly questions about Mudge and his diet. Mrs. Trevelyan and everybody. And they always look so queer."

Mr. Wilbram was reminded that while coming home that evening with a package in his hand he had met Trevelyan, and Trevelyan had inquired: "What's that? A bone for the dog?"

"Tomorrow," said A. Lincoln, "I'll ask him what he was driving at."

"What was the package?" queried his wife.

He fetched it from the hall. It had come to him at the store that day by registered mail.

"From Hildegarde," said Mrs. Wilbram, noting the Los Angeles postmark. Hildegarde was honeymooning among the orange groves. Wrote the happy bride:

Dear Aunt and Uncle:

Charles and I see by the paper that Mudge is hungry, so we are sending him a little present.

"What can the child mean, Abe?"

"Don't ask me," he answered. "Undo the present and see."

They loosened blue ribbons and wrappings of soft paper, and disclosed a link of bologna sausage.

Maddening? It might have been, if Hildegarde had not thought to inclose a page from the *Daily Southern Californian*, upon which, ringed with pencil marks, was a bit of miscellany headed, "Morel Prinsaples."

They read it through to the conclusion:

So as I say let us all stick up for our Morel Prinsaples like my Father come what may.—Willie Downey in *Ashland* (N. J.) *Bee*.

"Why!—why!—it's—it's me!" cried Mrs. Wilbram. "I did telephone to Mr. Myers for two pounds of bologna and a dog bone—on the night we dined at the Trevelyan's!"

"It comes mighty close to libel," fumed Wilbram.

"How do they dare! You must see Worthington Oakes about this, Abe."

"I certainly will," he vowed.

## VI

He certainly did, as Mr. Worthington Oakes, the publisher of the *Bee*, will testify. In the front office on the editorial floor he saw Mr. Oakes for a bad half-hour, and demanded a public retraction of the insult.

At about the same time a dapper stranger who had come in the elevator with Mr. Wilbram held speech with Assistant City-Editor Sloan in the local room at the other end of the hall.

"Yonder's your bird," said Mr. Sloan, pointing to a poetic-looking young man at a desk in a corner.

Crossing to the poet, who was absorbed in his day's poesy and talking to himself as he versified, the stranger smiled and spoke.

"Am I addressing the celebrated D.K.T.?"

"Am, cam, dam, damn, ham, jam, lamb——"

The far-away look of genius faded out of the poet's eyes.

"Not buying," said he. "My pay-envelope is mortgaged to you book-agents for ten years to come. Ma'am, ram, sam, cram, clam, gram, slam——"

"Books are not my line," said the dapper one briskly.

"I represent the Jones-Nonpareil Newspaper Syndicate.<sup>7</sup> In fact, I am Jones. I have a proposition to make to you, Mr. D.K.T., that may enable you to buy more books than

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7. *Newspaper Syndicate*, an organization which sells reading matter to a number of newspapers.

you can ever read. You know, of course, what the Jones Nonpareil service is. We reach the leading dailies of the United States and Canada——”

“Have a chair, Mr. Jones.”

“Thank you. We handle some very successful writers. Malcomb Hardy, you may have heard, takes his little five hundred a week out of us; and poor Larry Bonner pulled down eleven hundred as long as he had health. His Chinese-laundryman sketches might be selling yet.”

“Suspense is cruel,” spoke D.K.T. eagerly. “Let the glad news come.”

“Some time ago,” said the syndicate man, “you printed in your column an essay in imitation of a schoolboy’s. You called it ‘Moral Principles.’”

D.K.T. sank back with a low moan.

“If you can write six of those a week for a year,” continued the visitor, “you won’t ever need to slave any more. You can burn your pen and devote the rest of your life to golf and good works.”

The poet closed his eyes. “Sham, swam, diagram,” he murmured.

“Does a minimum guarantee of fifteen thousand a year look like anything to you? There will, of course, be the book rights and the movie rights in addition.”

“Anagram, epigram, telegram, flimflam — aha!” cried D.K.T. “Siam.” He wrote it down.

“That little skit of yours,” pursued the caller, “has swept the country. You have created a nation-wide demand. My finger is on the journalistic pulse, and I know. Can you repeat?”

He drew a paper from his pocketbook.

“Here is a list of subjects your imaginary Willie Downey might start with: The Monetary System; the Cost of Living; the League of Nations; Capital and Labor——”

Over the stranger's head an office boy whispered significantly: "Front office."

"Excuse me," said the poet, and hurried away.

With the publisher, in the front office, sat A. Lincoln Wilbram, quite purple in the cheeks. They had a file of the *Bee* before them.

"Diedrick," said Mr. Oakes, "on March eighteenth you printed this thing"—his finger on Willie's essay—"why did you do it?"

"What's the matter with it?" replied D.K.T.

"The matter with it," spoke Mr. Wilbram terribly, "is that it slanders my wife. It makes her out to eat dog bones. Friends of ours as far away as California have seen it and recognized her portrait, drawn by your scurrilous pen. The worst of it is, the slander is founded on fact. By what right do you air my domestic affairs before the public in this outrageous fashion?"

With agonized eyes the funny-man read the essay as far as the fateful line, "It was Mrs. Will Brum."

"My gosh!" he cried.

"How did you come to write such a thing?" Mr. Oakes demanded.

"Me write that thing? If I only had!"

The facts were recalled; the sending of Mr. Sloan and many reporters to Rutland; the need of extra hands at the copy-table that day.

"I found this contribution on my desk. It looked safe. In the rush of the morning I sent it up and never gave it another thought."

"So it is really a boy's essay, and not some of your own fooling?" asked Oakes.

"A boy's essay, yes; entered in Mr. Wilbram's prize contest, eliminated by the boy's teacher and shown by her to Mr. Sloan, who brought it to the shop. I know now that

Sloan meant me to change the author's name to save the kid from ridicule. If there were actual persons in it, I'm as amazed as Mrs. Wilbram."

"I wonder, Oakes," said Wilbram, "that a dignified newspaper like yours would print such trash, in the first place."

Worthington Oakes looked down his nose. D.K.T. took up the challenge.

"Trash, sir? If it's trash, why has the Ashland Telephone Company asked permission to reprint it on the front cover of their next directory?"

"Have they asked that?"

"They have; they say they will put a little moral principle into the telephone hogs in this town. And didn't a Fifth Avenue minister preach a sermon on it last Sunday? Doesn't the *Literary Review* give it half a page this week? Hasn't it been scissored<sup>8</sup> by almost every exchange editor in the land? Isn't there a man in the city-room now offering me fifteen thousand a year to write a daily screed like it?"

"You can see, Wilbram," said Mr. Oakes, "that there was no intention to injure or annoy. We are very sorry; but how can we print an apology to Mrs. Wilbram without making the matter worse?"

"Who is this Willie Downey?" demanded Wilbram. "And who is the school teacher?"

"I don't believe my moral principles will let me tell you," replied D.K.T. "I'm positive Mr. Sloan's won't let him. We received the essay in confidence."

"Enough said," Mr. Wilbram exclaimed, rising. "Good day to you. I don't need your help, anyway. I'll find out from the butcher."

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8 scissored, clipped and reprinted.

## VII

It seemed necessary that Mr. Sloan should call at the Lance home that evening. Whatever Miss Angelina might think of him, it was his duty to take counsel with her for the welfare of Willie.

He began with the least important of the grave matters upon his mind.

"Do you suppose your *protégé* could write some essays like the one we printed?"

"Why, Mr. Sloan?"

If Miss Angelina had responded, "Why, you hyena?" she would not have cut him more deeply than with her simple, "Why, Mr. Sloan?"

"A newspaper syndicate," he exclaimed, "has offered D.K.T. a fortune for a series of them."

"Poor Willie!" she sighed. "He flunked his English exam. today. I'm afraid I shall have him another year."

"He is a lucky boy," said Sloan.

"Do you think so?"

Clearly her meaning was, "Do you think he is lucky when a powerful newspaper goes out of its way to crush him?"

"There is no use approaching him with a literary contract?"

"Not with the baseball season just opening. His team beat the Watersides yesterday, sixteen—nothing. He has more important business on hand than writing for newspapers." Since Sloan wrote for a newspaper, this was rather a dig. Nevertheless, he persevered.

"A. Lincoln Wilbram is on his trail. Do you know that Willie libeled Mrs. Wilbram?"

"Oh! Sam. Surely I know about the libel. But is—is Mr. Wilbram really—has he discovered?"

"He came to the office today. We gave him no information; but he has other sources. He is bound to identify his enemy before he quits."

"I didn't know about the so-called slander at first," said she, "when I—when you——"

"When I promised to change Willie's name?"

"I found out when I went to them, on the night it came out in the paper. They were woefully frightened. They are frightened still. Mr. Downey has worked for Mr. Wilbram since he was a boy. They think of Mr. Wilbram almost as a god. It's—it's a tragedy, Sam, to them."

"Would it do any good to warn them?"

"They need no warning," said Miss Angelina. "Don't add to their terrors."

"I am more sorry than I can say. May I hope to be forgiven some day?"

"There's nothing to forgive, Sam. It was an accident. But don't you see what a dangerous weapon a newspaper is?"

"Worse than a car or a gun," he agreed.

As he strolled homeward along a stately avenue, wondering what he could do to avert the retribution that moved toward the Downeys, and finding that his assistant city-editor's resourcefulness availed him naught, he heard the scamper of feet behind him and whirled about with cane upraised in time to bring a snarling chow dog to a stand.

"Beat it, you brute!" he growled.

"Yeowp!" responded the chow dog, and leaped in air.

"Don't be alarmed," spoke a voice out of the gloom of the nearest lawn. "When he sees a man with a stick, he wants to play."

Sloan peered at the speaker's face. "Isn't this Mr. Wilbram? You were at the *Bee* office today, sir. May I have a word with you about the Willie Downey matter?"

"Come in," said Mr. Wilbram.



## VIII

On the first pay-day in May the impending sword cut its thread. Said a messenger to Jacob Downey: "They want you on the eighth floor." Downey set his jaws and followed.

In the mahogany-paneled room A. Lincoln Wilbram turned from the window and transfixed his servitor with eyes that bored like steel bits.

"Downey, I understand you have a literary son."

Jacob held his breath, eyed his accuser steadily, and assured himself that it would soon be over now.

"How about it, Downey?"

"I know what you mean, sir."

"Did you say the things printed there?"

The little man wasted no time in examining the newspaper clipping.

"Yes, sir, I did. If it has come to your lady's ears what I called her, I beg her pardon. But what I said I'll stick to. If I stand fifteen minutes in line in a meat store or any other kind of store, I've got a right to be waited on ahead of anybody that rings up, I don't give a ding who she is."

"Good for you, Downey. Let me see, how long have you worked for us?"

"Twenty-three years next January, sir."

"Floor-salesman all the while?"

"Since 1900. Before that I was a wrapper."

"How many men have been promoted over your head?"

"Three."

"Four," Wilbram corrected. "First was Miggins."

"I don't count him, sir. Him and I started together."

"Miggins was a failure. Then Farisell; now in prison. Next, McCardy; he ran off to Simonds & Co. the minute they crooked a finger at him. Last, young Prescott, who

is now to come up here with his father. Could you run the department if you had it?"

"Between you and I," replied Jacob Downey, sick, dizzy, trembling, "I been running the department these fifteen years."

"How'd you like to run it from now as manager? When I find a man with convictions and courage I advance him. The man who stands up is the man to sit down. That's evolution. If you could stand up to a big butcher like Myers and talk Dutch to him the way you did, I guess we need you at a desk. What do you say?"

A desk! A chance to rest his feet! Jacob Downey stiffened.

"Mr. Wilbram, I—I got to tell the truth. I never said those things to Myers. I just walked out."

"But you said them. You acknowledge it."

"I said 'em, yes—after I got home. To the family I said 'em. When I was in the meat shop I only thought 'em."

"So Myers has told me," said Jove, smiling. "Downey, my man, you've got more than moral courage. You've got common sense to go with it. Tell young Prescott to give you his keys."

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS

"Mr. Downey Sits Down" was first published in *Everybody's Magazine*, June, 1921.

1. Jacob Downey is no less representative of an American type than Robert, the hero of "His Job." Mr. Downey is a thoroughly honest and good man, but he is utterly lacking in ability to assert himself or to push himself forward and upward. Naturally, then, he should be presented to you in a sympathetic and humorous way. Though you know that he is not the stuff of which heroes are made, you can not help liking him, sympathizing with him in his bad luck, and rejoicing at the promotion which he obtains in the end. The reader who knows Jacob Downey

would have resented it if the author had assigned him an evil fate at the close of the story.

2. The atmosphere of the story is drawn from the life around and about us. It is the familiar American world: the butcher shop, the department store, the schoolroom, and the newspaper office. What elements in the story tend to give it popular acceptance? What social contrasts are represented? Find in a daily newspaper a "column" of the kind which D.K.T. conducted for the *Ashland Bee*. Write an essay on one of the topics suggested by Mr. Jones (page 35) in the style of Willie Downey's essay on "Morel Prinsaples."

3. How does Jacob Downey conform to the statements made in the Introduction (page xvi) in regard to the interest-arousing qualities the leading character in a short story should have? How does he first catch your interest? How is his character revealed to you by the first incident? What kind of language does he use? How does his use of the English language help to characterize him?

4. Why is Willie Downey's letter funny? Why is it also pathetic? How many incidents does the story contain? How are they mechanically separated?

*Suggested Reading.*—Good examples of the humorous story of the "downtrodden" character are: "Professor Todd's Used Car" by L. H. Robbins and "Alma Mater" by O. F. Lewis (O. Henry, 1920);\* "Old Peter Takes an Afternoon Off" by O. F. Lewis (O. Henry, 1922).

*Biographical Note.*—Leonard H. Robbins is on the editorial staff of the *New York Times*. He began newspaper work at Lincoln, Nebraska, where he was born in 1877. He is the author of numerous short stories and of one volume of verse, *Jersey Jingles* (1908).

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\*"O. Henry, 1920" (and of other years) in the Suggested Reading lists throughout these Notes and Questions refers to the *O. Henry Memorial Award, Prize Stories of 1920* (and to other years since 1919); "O'Brien, 1923" (and of other years) refers to *The Best Short Stories of 1923* (and to other years since 1915) edited by E. J. O'Brien. For the details of publication of these collections, see the Appendix, page 336.

## "THEY GRIND EXCEEDING SMALL"\*

BEN AMES WILLIAMS

I telephoned down the hill to Hazen Kinch. "Hazen," I asked, "are you going to town today?"

"Yes, yes," he said abruptly in his quick, harsh fashion. "Of course I'm going to town."

"I've a matter of business," I suggested.

"Come along," he invited brusquely. "Come along."

There was not another man within forty miles to whom he would have given that invitation.

"I'll be down in ten minutes," I promised him; and I went to put on my Pontiacs<sup>1</sup> and heavy half boots over them and started downhill through the sandy snow. It was bitterly cold; it had been a cold winter. The bay—I could see it from my window—was frozen over for a dozen miles east and west and thirty north and south; and that had not happened in close to a score of years. Men were freighting across to the islands with heavy teams. Automobiles had beaten a rough road along the course the steamers took in summer. A man who had ventured to stock one of the lower islands with foxes for the sake of their fur, counting on the water to hold them prisoners, had gone bankrupt when his stock in trade escaped across the ice. Bitterly cold and steadily cold, and deep snow lay upon the hills, blue-white in the distance. The evergreens were blue-black

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The title of the story is taken from a line of "Retribution" by the German poet Friedrich von Logau (1604-1655):

"Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind  
exceeding small."

1. *Pontiacs*, felt stockings.

blotches on this whiteness. The birches, almost indistinguishable, were like trees in camouflage. To me the hills are never so grand as in this winter coat they wear. It is easy to believe that a brooding God dwells upon them. I wondered as I plowed my way down to Hazen Kinch's farm whether God did indeed dwell among these hills; and I wondered what he thought of Hazen Kinch.

This was no new matter of thought with me. I had given some thought to Hazen in the past. I was interested in the man and in that which should come to him. He was, it seemed to me, a problem in fundamental ethics; he was, as matters stood, a demonstration of the essential uprightness of things as they are. The biologist would have called him a sport,<sup>2</sup> a deviation from type, a violation of all the proper laws of life. That such a man should live and grow great and prosper was not fitting; in a well-regulated world it should not be. Yet Hazen Kinch did live; he had grown—in his small way—great; and, by our lights, he had prospered. Therefore I watched him. There was about the man the fascination which clothes a tight-rope walker above Niagara; an aëronaut in the midst of the nose dive. The spectator stares with half-caught breath, afraid to see and afraid to miss seeing the ultimate catastrophe. Sometimes I wondered whether Hazen Kinch suspected this attitude on my part. It was not impossible. There was a cynical courage in the man; it might have amused him. Certainly I was the only man who had in any degree his confidence.

I have said there was not another within forty miles whom he would have given a lift to town; I doubt if there was another man anywhere for whom he would have done this small favor. He seemed to find a mocking sort of pleasure in my company.

When I came to his house he was in the barn harnessing

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2. *sport*, in biology, a new and unusual plant or flower differing from its parent stock—as a pink phlox that springs from a bed of white-blossoming phloxes.

his mare to the sleigh. The mare was a good animal, fast and strong. She feared and she hated Hazen. I could see her roll her eyes backward at him as he adjusted the traces. He called to me without turning, "Shut the door! Shut the door!"

I slid the door shut behind me. There was within the barn the curious chill warmth which housed animals generate to protect themselves against our winters.

"It will snow," I told Hazen. "I was not sure you would go."

He laughed crookedly, jerking at the trace.

"Snow!" he exclaimed. "A man would think you were personal manager of the weather. Why do you say it will snow?"

"The drift of the clouds—and it's warmer," I told him.

"I'll not have it snowing," he said, and looked at me and cackled. He was a little, thin, old man with meager whiskers and a curious precision of speech; and I think he got some enjoyment out of watching my expression at such remarks as this. He elaborated his assumption that the universe was conducted for his benefit, in order to see my silent revolt at the suggestion. "I'll not have it snowing," he said. "Open the door."

He led the mare out and stopped by the kitchen door.

"Come in," he said. "A hot drink."

I went with him into the kitchen. His wife was there, and their child. The woman was lean and frail; and she was afraid of him. The countryside said he had taken her in payment of a bad debt. Her father had owed him money which he could not pay.

"I decided it was time I had a wife," Hazen used to say to me.

The child was on the floor. The woman had a drink of milk and egg and rum, hot and ready for us. We drank, and Hazen knelt beside the child. A boy baby, not yet

two years old. It is an ugly thing to say, but I hated this child. There was evil malevolence in his baby eyes. Also, he was deformed—a twisted leg. The women of the neighborhood sometimes said he would be better dead. But Hazen Kinch loved him. He lifted him in his arms now with a curious passion in his movement, and the child stared at him sullenly. When his mother came near, the baby squalled at her, and Hazen said roughly, "Stand away! Leave him alone!"

She moved back furtively; and Hazen asked me, displaying the child, "A fine boy, eh?"

I said nothing, and in his cracked old voice he mumbled endearments to the baby. I had often wondered whether his love for the child redeemed the man; or merely made him vulnerable. Certainly any harm that might come to the baby would be a crushing blow to Hazen.

He put the child down on the floor again and he said to the woman curtly, "Tend him well." She nodded. There was a dumb submission in her eyes; but through this blank veil I had seen now and then a blaze of pain.

Hazen went out of the door without further word to her, and I followed him. We got into the sleigh, bundling ourselves into the robes for the six-mile drive along the drifted road to town. There was a feeling of storm in the air. I looked at the sky; so did Hazen Kinch. He guessed what I would have said and he answered me before I could speak.

"I'll not have it snowing," he said, and leered at me.

Nevertheless, I knew the storm would come. The mare turned out of the barnyard and plowed through the drift and struck hard-packed road. Her hoofs beat a swift tattoo; our runners sang beneath us. We dropped to the little bridge and across, and began the mile-long climb to the top of Rayborn Hill. The road from Hazen's house to town is compounded of such ups and downs.



At the top of the hill we paused for a moment to breathe the mare; paused just in front of the big old Rayborn house, that has stood there for more years than most of us remember. It was closed and shuttered and deserted; and Hazen dipped his whip toward it and said meanly: "An ugly, improvident lot, the Rayborns were."

I had known only one of them—the eldest son. A fine man, I had thought him. Picking apples in his orchard, he fell one October and broke his neck. His widow tried to make a go of the place, but she borrowed of Hazen and he had evicted her this three months back. It was one of the lesser evils he had done. I looked at the house and at him, and he clucked to the mare, and we dipped into the steep valley below the hill.

The wind had a sweep in that valley and there was a drift of snow across it and across the road. This drift was well packed by the wind, but when we drove over its top our left-hand runner broke through the coaming and we tumbled into the snow, Hazen and I. We were well entangled in the rugs. The mare gave a frightened start, but Hazen had held the reins and the whip so that she could not break away. We got up together, he and I, and we righted the sleigh and set it upon the road again. I remember that it was becoming bitter cold and the sun was no longer shining. There was a steel-gray veil drawn across the bay.

When the sleigh was upright Hazen went forward and stood beside the mare. Some men, blaming the beast without reason, would have beaten her. They would have cursed, cried out upon her. That was not the cut of Hazen Kinch. But I could see that he was angry and I was not surprised when he reached up and gripped the horse's ear. He pulled the mare's head down and twisted the ear viciously. All in a silence that was deadly.

The mare snorted and tried to rear back, and Hazen clapped the butt of his whip across her knees. She stood still, quivering, and he wrenched at her ear again.

"Now," he said softly, "keep the road."

And he returned and climbed to his place beside me in the sleigh. I said nothing. I might have interfered, but something had always impelled me to keep back my hand from Hazen Kinch.

We drove on and the mare was lame. Though Hazen pushed her, we were slow in coming to town; before we reached Hazen's office the snow was whirling down—a pressure of driving, swirling flakes like a heavy white hand.

I left Hazen at the stair that led to his office and I went about my business of the day. He said as I turned away, "Be here at three."

I nodded. But I did not think we should drive home that afternoon. I had some knowledge of storms.

That which brought me to town was not engrossing. I found time to go to the stable and see Hazen's mare. There was an ugly welt across her knees and some blood had flowed. The stableman had tended the welt, and cursed Hazen in my hearing. It was still snowing, and the stable boss, looking out at the driving flakes, spat upon the ground and said to me, "Them legs'll go stiff. That mare won't go home tonight."

"I think you are right," I agreed.

"The white-whiskered skunk!" he said, and I knew he spoke of Hazen.

At a quarter of three I took myself to Hazen Kinch's office. It was not much of an office; not that Hazen could not have afforded a better. But it was up two flights—an attic room ill lighted. A small air-tight stove kept the room stifling hot. The room also was air-tight. Hazen had a table and two chairs, and an iron safe in the corner. He

put a pathetic trust in that safe. I believe I could have opened it with a screw-driver. I met him as I climbed the stairs. He said harshly, "I'm going to telephone. They say the road's impassable."

He had no telephone in his office; he used one in the store below—a small economy fairly typical of Hazen.

"I'll wait in the office," I told him.

"Go ahead," he agreed, halfway down the stairs.

I went up to his office and closed the drafts of the stove—it was red hot—and tried to open the one window, but it was nailed fast. Then Hazen came back up the stairs grumbling.

"Damn the snow," he said. "The wire is down."

"Where to?" I asked.

"My house, man! To my house!"

"You wanted to telephone home that you——"

"I can't get home tonight. You'll have to go to the hotel."

I nodded good-naturedly.

"All right. You, too, I suppose."

"I'll sleep here," he said.

I looked around. There was no bed, no cot, nothing but the two stiff chairs. He saw my glance and said angrily: "I've slept on the floor before."

I was always interested in the man's mental processes.

"You wanted to telephone Mrs. Kinch not to worry?" I suggested.

"Pshaw; let her fret!" said Hazen. "I wanted to ask after my boy." His eyes expanded; he rubbed his hands a little, cackling: "A fine boy, sir! A fine boy!"

It was then we heard Doan Marshley coming up the stairs. We heard his stumbling steps as he began the last flight, and Hazen seemed to cock his ears as he listened. Then he sat still and watched the door. The steps climbed

nearer; they stopped in the dim little hall outside the door, and someone fumbled with the knob. When the door opened we saw who it was. I knew Marshey. He lived a little beyond Hazen on the same road. Lived in a little two-room cabin—it was little more—with his wife and his five children; lived meanly and pitifully, groveling in the soil for daily bread, sweating life out of the earth—life and no more. A thin man, racking thin; a forward-thrusting neck and a bony face and a sad and drooping mustache about his mouth. His eyes were meek and weary.

He stood in the doorway blinking at us; and with his gloved hands—they were stiff and awkward with the cold—he unwound the ragged muffler that was about his neck and he brushed weakly at the snow upon his head and shoulders. Hazen said angrily, "Come in! Do you want my stove to heat the town?"

Doan shuffled in and he shut the door behind him. He said: "Howdy, Mr. Kinch." And he smiled in a humble and placating way.

Hazen said, "What's your business? Your interest is due."

Doan nodded.

"Yeah, I know, Mr. Kinch. I cain't pay it all."

Kinch exclaimed impatiently, "An old story! How much can you pay?"

"Eleven dollars and fifty cents," said Doan.

"You owe twenty."

"I aim to pay it when the hens begin to lay."

Hazen laughed scornfully.

"You aim to pay! Marshey, if your old farm was worth taking, I'd have you out in this snow, you old scamp!"

Doan pleaded dully, "Don't do that, Mr. Kinch! I aim to pay."

Hazen clapped his hands on the table.

"Rats! Come! Give me what you've got! And, Marshey, you'll have to get the rest. I'm sick of waiting on you."

Marshey came shuffling toward the table. Hazen was sitting with the table between him and the man, and I was a little behind Hazen at one side. Marshey blinked as he came nearer, and his weak, near-sighted eyes turned from Hazen to me. I could see that the man was stiff with the cold.

When he came to the table in front of Hazen, he took off his thick gloves. His hands were blue. Laying the gloves on the table, he reached into an inner pocket of his torn coat and drew out a little cloth pouch. He fumbled into this and I heard the clink of coins. He drew out two quarters and laid them on the table before Hazen, and Hazen picked them up. Then he reached into the pouch again.

Something dropped out of the mouth of the little cloth bag and fell soundlessly on the table. It looked to me like a bill, a piece of paper currency. I was about to speak, but Hazen, without an instant's hesitation, had dropped his hand on the thing and drawn it unostentatiously toward him. When he lifted his hand the money—if it was money—was gone.

Marshey drew out a little roll of worn bills. Hazen took them out of his hand and counted them swiftly.

"All right," he said. "Eleven-fifty. I'll give you a receipt. But you mind me, Doan Marshey, you get the rest before the month's out. I've been too slack with you."

Marshey, his dull eyes watching Hazen write the receipt, was folding the little pouch and putting it away. Hazen tore off the bit of paper and gave it to him. Doan took it and he said humbly: "Thank'e, sir."

Hazen nodded. "Mind now!" he exclaimed, and Marshey said, "I'll do my best, Mr. Kinch."

Then he turned and shuffled across the room and out into the hall. We heard him descending the stairs.

When he was gone I asked Hazen casually: "What was that he dropped upon the table?"

"A dollar," said Hazen promptly. "A dollar bill. The miserable fool!"

"You mean to give it back to him?" I asked.

He stared at me and he laughed. "No! If he can't take care of his own money—that's why he is what he is."

"Still it is his money."

"He owes me more than that."

"Going to give him credit for it?"

"Am I a fool?" Hazen asked me. "Do I look like so much of a fool?"

"He may charge you with finding it."

"He loses a dollar; I find one. Can he prove ownership? Pshaw!" Hazen laughed again.

"If there is any spine in him he will lay the thing to you as a theft," I suggested. I was not afraid of angering Hazen. He allowed me open speech; he seemed to find a grim pleasure in my distaste for him and for his way of life.

"If there were any backbone in the man he would not be paying me eighty dollars a year on a five-hundred dollar loan—discounted."

Hazen grinned at me triumphantly.

"I wonder if he will ever come back," I said.

"Besides," Hazen continued, "he lied to me. He told me the eleven-fifty was all he had."

"Yes," I agreed. "There is no doubt he lied to you."

Hazen had a letter to write and he bent to it. I sat by the stove and watched him and considered. He had not yet finished the letter when we heard Marshey returning. His dragging feet on the stair were unmistakable. At the

sound of his weary feet some tide of indignation surged up in me. I was minded to do violence to Hazen Kinch. But a deeper impulse held my hand from the man.

Marshey came in and his weary eyes wandered about the room. They inspected the floor; they inspected me; they inspected Hazen Kinch's table, and they rose at last humbly to Hazen Kinch.

"Well?" said Hazen.

"I lost a dollar," Marshey told him. "I 'lowed I might have dropped it here."

Hazen frowned.

"You told me eleven-fifty was all you had."

"This here dollar wa'n't mine."

The money-lender laughed.

"Likely! Who would give you a dollar? You lied to me, or you're lying now. I don't believe you lost a dollar."

Marshey reiterated weakly, "I lost a dollar."

"Well," said Hazen, "there's no dollar of yours here."

"It was to git medicine," Marshey said. "It wa'n't mine."

Hazen Kinch exclaimed, "By God, I believe you're accusing me!"

Marshey lifted both hands placatingly.

"No, Mr. Kinch. No, sir." His eyes once more wandered about the room. "Mebbe I dropped it in the snow," he said.

He turned to the door. Even in his slow shuffle there was a hint of trembling eagerness to escape. He went out and down the stairs. Hazen looked at me, his old face wrinkling mirthfully.

"You see?" he said.

I left him a little later and went out into the street. On the way to the hotel I stopped for a cigar at the drug store. Marshey was there, talking with the druggist.



I heard the druggist say, "No, Marshey, I'm sorry. I've been stung too often."

Marshey nodded humbly.

"I didn't 'low you'd figure to trust me," he agreed. "It's all right. I didn't 'low you would."

It was my impulse to give him the dollar he needed, but I did not do it. An overpowering compulsion bade me keep my hands off this matter. I did not know what I expected, but I felt the imminence of the fate. When I went out into the snow it seemed to me the groan of the gale was like the slow grind of millstones, one upon the other.

I thought long upon the matter of Hazen Kinch before sleep came that night.

Toward morning the snow must have stopped; but the wind increased and carved the drifts till sunrise; then abruptly died. I met Hazen at the post office at ten and he said, "I'm starting home."

I asked, "Can you get through?"

He laughed. "I will get through," he told me.

"You're in haste."

"I want to see that boy of mine," said Hazen Kinch. "A fine boy, man!"

"I'm ready," I said.

When we took the road the mare was limping. But she seemed to work out the stiffness in her knees, and after a mile or so of the hard going she was moving smoothly enough. We made good time.

The day, as so often happens after a storm, was full of blinding sunlight. The glare of the sun upon the snow was almost unbearable. I kept my eyes all but closed, but there was so much beauty abroad in the land that I could not bear to close them altogether. The snow clung to twigs and to fences and to wires, and a thousand flames glinted from every crystal when the sun struck down upon the

drifts. The pine wood upon the eastern slope of Rayborn Hill was a checkerboard of rich color—green and blue and black and white, indescribably brilliant. When we crossed the bridge at the foot of the hill we could hear the brook playing beneath the ice that sheathed it. On the white pages of the snow wild things had writ here and there the fine-traced tale of their morning's adventuring. We saw once where a fox had pinned a big snowshoe rabbit in a drift.

Hazen talked much of that child of his on the homeward way. I said little. From the top of Rayborn Hill we sighted his house and he laid the whip along the mare and we went down that long last descent at a speed that left me breathless. I shut my eyes and huddled low in the robes for protection against the bitter wind, and I did not open them again until we turned into Hazen's barnyard, plowing through the unpacked snow. When we stopped Hazen laughed.

"Ha!!" he said. "Now, come in, man, and warm yourself and see the baby!"

He was ahead of me at the door; I went in upon his heels. We came into the kitchen together.

In the cold of winter Hazen's kitchen was also living-room and bedroom. The arrangement saved firewood. There was a bed against the wall opposite the door. As we came in a woman got up stiffly from the bed and I saw that this woman was Hazen's wife. But there was a change in her. She was bleak as cold iron and she was somehow strong.

Hazen rasped at this woman impatiently, "Well, I'm home! Where is the boy?"

She looked at him and her lips moved soundlessly. She closed them, opened them again. This time she was able to speak.

"The boy?" she said to Hazen. "The boy is dead!"

The dim-lit kitchen was very quiet for a little time. I felt myself breathe deeply, almost with relief. The thing for which I had waited—it had come. And I looked at Hazen Kinch.

He had always been a little, thin man. He was shrunken now and very white and very still. Only his face twitched. A muscle in one cheek jerked and jerked and jerked at his mouth. It was as though he controlled a desire to smile. That jerking, suppressed smile upon his white and tortured countenance was terrible. I could see the blood drain down from his forehead, down from his cheeks. He became white as death itself.

After a little he tried to speak. I do not know what he meant to say. But what he did was to repeat—as though he had not heard her words—the question which he had flung at her in the beginning. He said huskily, "Where is the boy?"

She looked toward the bed and Hazen looked that way; and then he went across to the bed with uncertain little steps. I followed him. I saw the little twisted body there. The woman had been keeping it warm with her own body. It must have been in her arms when we came in. The tumbled coverings, the crushed pillows, spoke mutely of a ferocious intensity of grief.

Hazen looked down at the little body. He made no move to touch it, but I heard him whisper to himself, "Fine boy!"

After a while he looked at the woman. She seemed to feel an accusation in his eyes. She said, "I did all I could."

He asked, "What was it?"

I had it in me—though I had reason enough to despise the little man—to pity Hazen Kinch.

"He coughed," said the woman. "I knew it was croup. You know I asked you to get the medicine—ipecac. You said no matter—no need—and you had gone."

She looked out of the window.

"I went for help—to Annie Marshey. Her babies had had it. Her husband was going to town and she said he would get the medicine for me. She did not tell it was for me. He would not have done it for you. He did not know. So I gave her a dollar to give him—to bring it out to me.

"He came home in the snow last night. Baby was bad by that time, so I was watching for Doan. I stopped him in the road and I asked him for the medicine. When he understood he told me. He had not brought it."

The woman was speaking dully, without emotion.

"It would have been in time, even then," she said. "But after a while, after that, baby died!"

I understood in that moment the working of the mills. And when I looked at Hazen Kinch I saw that he, too, was beginning to understand. There is a just mercilessness in an aroused God. Hazen Kinch was driven to questions.

"Why—didn't Marshey fetch it?" he asked.

She said slowly: "They would not trust him—at the store."

His mouth twitched, he raised his hands.

"The money!" he cried. "The money! What did he do with that?"

"He said," the woman answered, "that he lost it—in your office—lost the money there."

After a little the old money-lender leaned far back like a man wrenched with agony. His body was contorted; his face was terrible. His dry mouth opened wide.

He screamed!

Halfway up the hill to my house I stopped to look back and all around. The vast hills in their snowy garments looked down upon the land, upon the house of Hazen Kinch—still and silent and inscrutable.

I knew now that a just and brooding God dwelt among these hills.

### NOTES AND QUESTIONS

"They Grind Exceeding Small" was first published in *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 13, 1919.

1. The compact and concise type of short story is well illustrated in "They Grind Exceeding Small." The tragedy of a life-time is here compressed into a few pages. The story produces a simple, single effect with few details and with the directness which marks the stories of Edgar Allan Poe. Do you find any details unnecessary for bringing out the single impression the author tried to produce? Why, for instance, is Hazen Kinch's opinion of the Rayborns quoted?

2. The author desires to produce a feeling of mystery and a sense that something terrible is about to happen. Does the intensely cold weather add to the impression the author seeks to arouse in you? Does it at all account for Hazen Kinch's character? What part does it play in working out the plot?

3. What quality of character brought about Kinch's downfall? At what place in the narrative is it first suggested that his guilt will be punished by some unseen force? Did the sentence, "Certainly any harm that might come to the baby would be a crushing blow to Hazen" (page 46), suggest to you the ending? Does the restatement of the theme of the story in the last paragraph add to the effect?

4. What part does Marshey play in carrying out the punishment which is due Kinch? Why is it more effective for him to bring the vengeance on Kinch without knowing it than it would have been if he had acted from motives of revenge? What kept the teller of the story ("I") from paying for the medicine at the drug store? Does the author make it seem reasonable that a ruling fate held him back?

5. Outline the main steps in the crushing of Kinch.

6. Show how the terse, direct style suits the tone of this story. Why would a loose, rambling form of sentence structure seem out of place?

7. The story is told in the first person, by an observer of all the action. What means does the author use to make it seem probable that this spectator was present at all of the scenes?

*Suggested Reading.*—"The Preliminaries" by Cornelia H. P. Comer (in *Atlantic Narratives*, First Series); "Shelby" by C. H. Towne (O'Brien, 1923). Other stories with a New England background: *Homespun and Gold* by Alice Brown. Other stories by Ben Ames Williams: *Thrifty Stock, and Other Stories*. Is "They Grind Exceeding Small" the usual type of story Williams writes?

*Biographical Note.*—Ben Ames Williams is living at Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. He was graduated from Dartmouth College in 1910 and was a newspaper writer until 1916. Four volumes of his short stories have been published. He was born at Macon, Mississippi, in 1889.

## DOWN ON THEIR KNEES\*

WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

Si Nickerson's Lane! Had the ghost of that Old Harbor whaler come back to his native street, amazement must have moved his phantom features. The little houses scrambling up its length, once so drab and austere, seemed to have gone mad with their pinks and yellows and emeralds. The babies under the grapevines were brown as shoes, and so were the old women, bright-kerchiefed, gossiping across the fences in a tongue he had heard, perhaps, when he used to put in at the Azores for water and green stuff, but never here. Manta's, Silva's, Cabral's, on the mailboxes—and in the Nickerson house at the top, antique and white-pillared, lived now a Portuguese Peter—Peter Um Perna—as one would say, Peter One-Leg. The ghostly visitant might have dropped a tear at all this, or, a philosopher, he might have turned his hollow eyes on Angel Avellar, making lace behind the pink palings of her grandmother's yard, and, murmuring, "For of such is the kingdom of the future," gone back to his grave.

Angel's grandmother had to walk with a stick, she was so old; an absurd, dried-up person with a topknot the size of a thimble, bad knees, arms like broom-handles and a hundred times as tough and never thoroughly dry. At almost any time of the day, or of the year, they might have been seen in the yard or the shed, stabbing in and out of the washtub, furious, uncontrollable, thrashing the suds

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about at one end and the thin old woman at the other. One wondered if she never rebelled at them. Perhaps she did. They washed for a good many people, among them Peter Um Perna; and the One-Leg, since he had become so rich, changed his shirt every other day when he was ashore from his vessel.

At any rate; other folks rebelled; it made them nervous to see her work so long and so hard. But when they demanded across their fences why she would put none of it on that "lazy piece of an Angelina," she made no answer beyond tapping her nose reflectively with a dripping finger-bone. Or perhaps she might be hanging out one of Peter Um Perna's shirts, and pause to stare at it with an odd, preoccupied attention. Or again, if the vessels chanced to be coming in that day, she might hobble into the house and, finding Angel reading on the sofa, pet her lustrous hair, mumble and smile, and say, "Y'r lace, Pretty, out 'n the garden," or perhaps, "The flowe's needs pickin', Pretty."

Peter Um Perna made his men carry him ashore on their shoulders when his vessel came back from the fishing-grounds. Had a drop of water touched his single russet shoe, there is no saying what would have happened. They hated him as no other skipper was hated; yet he was a lucky man to go with, a "dog" for knowing the fish, and it was a sight to see them coming up Nickerson's Lane after a "big trip," in their boots and hard, round rubber hats, loitering and shuffling so as to let him keep his wooden-legged lead of them, and bellowing across the yards of how many fish they had taken and how many dollars they had shared.

Um Perna said nothing; there was no need. He stumped along in front with his hat pulled down to hide the scar on his forehead, one thumb tucked over the gold watch-chain, the other preening his black mustache. One would

think he had forgotten there were other people in the world, for he turned his eyes neither to the right nor to the left, not even when he passed the pink-fenced yard where Angel Avellar always chanced to be, picking flowers, perhaps, or reaching up her brown, well-rounded arms to tuck a vine-tendril in place, or perhaps sitting with her head bent over her lace-hooks, the hair hiding her face except for an edge of cheek, deep-colored under the eyes of Um Perna's men—especially of Man'el Costa. For saying his name over to herself, or even thinking of Man'el, made Angel's cheeks hot this autumn of her seventeenth year.

Folks laughed at Angel for sitting out of doors when the flowers were all gone and the grass-plot dried up. But it was on one of these afternoons, with the sun as low as a man's head and a cold wind spattering sand among the roofs, that Man'el Costa leaned his ditty-bag on the palings and asked Angel to go to the St. Michel's dance with him.

"What y' say?" he urged. His soft, dark cheeks grew darker still at the snickers of his mates behind him.

Angel wanted to laugh and to weep at the same time. She could not have lifted her eyes if a hundred red-hot needles had pricked her. Man'el Costa! Man'el Costa! If she could only so much as nod her head. Her heart jumped up and choked her; Man'el was turning way, not understanding. She must, somehow, get 'o her feet.

"M-m-man'el!" she stammered, her face stricken with fire.

It was not Man'el there facing her, but Peter Um Perna himself, who had waved Man'el away. He looked her over at his leisure.

"What's y'r name?" he inquired, with a faint sneer. When he saw the girl trembling and quite unable to answer, the sneer broadened.

"I guess that's one o' my good shirts dryin' on the line

there. Better bring it to my house after supper, whatever y'r name is, because I'll want to wear it tomorrow."

Angel got into the house somehow. At first, on the front-room sofa, even the tears refused to come, she was so bruised and robbed. Man'el had not understood, and he would never ask her again, and there were so many girls. By and by the world grew warmer and blacker, and she could sob till she was worn out to her finger-tips, and Avo<sup>1</sup> Avellar's hand on hers in the gloom was something holding her up from the deep. The Avo began to croon after a time, a curious mumbling overtone of exultation.

"I hear 'm, Pretty. I was behind the curtain. Y' don't know men yit, or y' wouldn't take on so. 'Ain't he spoke to y'u, Pretty? He claims t' hate women, an' yit he's spoke t' my Pretty. Dry y'r tears, dearie. Didn't y' hear he wanted y' should bring the wash t'night? This Peter wants t' see my Pretty again, does he? Hee-hee-hee-hee!"

It was so hard for tired Angel to understand. What was the Avo talking about? Turning over, she stared at the shadowy ceiling, her eyes growing wider and wider, and her wrists cold, as if in an ice-pack.

"Who you mean?" she whispered. "Not—not the One-Leg, Avo!"

"Yis, the One-Leg, Pretty. The One-Leg that lives in the big house up there and pays four dollars f'r a shirt, they tell, up to Boston. If more men was to git a leg catched into a jibin' boom—what a world—what a world! Mebby they'd all git made then, an' proud, an' mebby own their three good vessels same's Peter. A touch o' gold that was, Pretty. He's the same's the rest of 'em afore that—remember? And today—today—he's spoke to Angel Avellar. Come, lay out y'r Sunday frock while I git the supper ready. Hee-hee——"

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1. Avo, Portuguese for *grandmother*.

She hobbled off, bubbling over her stick, to rattle her supper pots in the kitchen. The illumination from the doorway lay across the carpet. Angel, turning on her side, watched the shadow crossing and recrossing the bright patch, huge and misshapen and curiously agile.

"Was *that* the reason why she always sent me out into the yard then?" It was an astounding question, heavy and bitter and dark, made up, as it were, of all the questions of all the young girls standing on the thresholds of all the ages. It seemed impossible for her to go out into the light, but she had to when the Avo called.

"I don't want t'—t' take the wash," she pleaded, bending her head lower over the cod-cheek chowder. Abashed by the unexpected silence, she hazarded a peep through her lashes. The old woman began to laugh with a shrill, angry sarcasm, throwing one skinny arm over her head like a dancing-girl.

"Oh, yis, yis! *I* go! That's what y' want? I'm so strong an' straight an' pretty. I heave my stick in the pig-yard an' skip like Tony Putton's goat—an' who knows if Peter One-Leg won't ast me for his wife. Ahhh! Hee-hee-hee!" She dropped her irony in a wink for a kind of wrinkled tenderness. "Ah, my Pretty—I f'rgit my Pretty's a little girl yit. But you won't be nervous now, will you? I was same's that when I was young, too; I shivered and cried when I was lucky—same's you, Pretty. It'll be all right. You go 'long. Go 'long! Here, le'me fix y'r hair a second. Y'r dress is pretty. Pretty dress!"

When Angel went up the lane, carrying the bundle on her head, all the little houses with their bright eyes crowded close to watch her pass, and the moon sent a ramping, shameless shadow ahead to drag her slow feet along. The austere autumnal wind shamed her, making nothing of her Sunday frock and stinging her with its blast

till she would have turned and run down again had it not been for a wisp of arm waving her on from the familiar shadows below.

Peter's sister Philomena opened the back door slightly, almost before Angel could knock. Philomena was a narrow-chested, niggardly, black-clothed creature, standing forever on the brink of disaster. Her brother's affluence, his three vessels, even this house, remained incredible to her, a golden spell to be shattered by a breath of skepticism. She never spent money without a haunting fear lest the shopman chance to bite the coin and find it dust. She gave Angel no time to speak.

"I know what y'r after," she challenged, squeezing her tall, chalky face in the crack. "Na—na—we don't want you snoopin' round here. Go 'way!" But when Angel, unspeakably relieved, turned to go, the woman was out, plucking at her elbow with frightened fingers. "Na—na—come in! I s'pose you got to come in. Oh, dear me—my brother Peter—"

Peter Um Perna sat in front of a base-burner in the living-room, his wooden peg side by side with his russet shoe, and both of a color in the glow from the door, his hands folded across his white waistcoat, and his head sunken forward in a pose of meditation or perhaps fatigue.

"Oh, yes," he murmured, hearing Angel behind him. He kept her standing in a torment of uncertainty, neither offering to rise himself nor asking her to sit. "What's y'r name?" This was one of his finest thrusts, to seem not to know one's name.

"Angeline," the girl stammered, keeping her eyes on a dim Virgin and dimmer Child between the long windows, blue with the moon, so she would not have to look at him. "Angel—Angel Avellar, s-s-sir!"

"Angel, eh?" The scar on his forehead gathered up all

the light and burned like a crooked beacon. "Not a bad name," he mused. "You must 've just come t' Old Harbor; I never seen you before t'day."

His face did not change at this quite wanton lie, but the girl's did in a curious way. Hitching his bad leg over the good, the man became engrossed in its shining metal tip.

"You'll hear folks talkin' about me before you been here long, Angel. That's the name, ain't it? All of 'em talks about me because I'm so good to 'em an' because I'm so handsome. It's my gold foot catches their eye. Look! Won't see another foot in Old Harbor shines like that in the light. Brass, eh? Might 's well be gold. Then they like the rose-mark on my forehead. The saints 've got halos, remember."

Half turning of a sudden, he clapped his hands together, crying: "Come, come! Stand over here where I can take a look at you. Mmm. That's better." He stared her over slowly from head to foot, one hand busy preening his mustache, the other slapping nervously on the chair-arm. "I'm thinkin' o' gittin' married one o' these days." He paused to watch the color sweeping the girl's face. There was a light in his eyes of an inexplicable glee. "Yes, I'm goin' t' git a woman when I can find the kind I want, or I won't have 'er. Her hair won't be black, either, but the color o' gold, and curly, and her eyes the color o' sky. She'll be lighter color all told 'n you are, an' not near so lean—and rich! She'll keep a girl t' do up her hair, and a man jus' to black her shoes. An' she'll come crawlin' on her knees for me t' marry 'er, this woman."

Angel could not understand. She had no way of defending herself against this singular and meaningless brutality. The man seemed amused at her horror and her pathetic, inarticulate passion. He carried on in a shrill mood.



"You oughtn't to have no trouble gettin' a man, now. You're good enough a-plenty for some poor devil, like a young fellow in my vessel now; I forget his name—Man'el somethin'. Now why don't y' go to work an' get out in the yard when the vessel comes in? Mebbby this boy might happen t' see you an' take a fancy. Who knows? He may like 'em lean an' black, an' he poor, too. . . . That's all! You c'n go now!" He shook his hands at her with an unaccountable ferocity. "D' y' hear? You c'n *go*.—Mena! Mena! Where 'n the devil— Why don't y' let this girl out?"

Man'el Costa was waiting outside Peter Um Perna's gate, rather heroic in the moonlight, leaning against a tree-hole and wondering how he should hail Angel Avellar, for he had seen her going in with the wash. Man'el was not used to girls quite so timid as Angel; he found it rather exciting, and the feeling deepened the natural fire of his eyes and whipped his fine dark cheeks with red.

"Oh, hello there!" he called, suddenly, catching sight of a figure at the gate. "What's the hurry, Angel? What's— what's eatin' you?" he finished, bewildered to find his hands imprisoned and Angel's eyes shining close with a light he could not fathom.

"Was you waitin' for me, Man'el?"

"Yeh!" He had planned to lie about that.

"Come, let's go. Quick, Man'el, let's go!"

She tugged at his hand, and he followed a few steps down the hill, peering sidewise. It was like a dream, with the weird illumination and the wind and the naked vine-stems shivering among the yards. And this was Angel Avellar! He felt foolish, never to have seen through her before, and at the same time filled with a wild chill of discovery.



"Look here!" he cried, suddenly, tugging her to stop. "What you laughin' for?" And then, still more uncertain, "What—what you cryin' for, or are you laughin', anyway?"

The girl's hands, pressed against her bosom, rose and fell as though she had been running.

"Will you kill that one-leg pig, Man'el?"

"Sure!" He concluded that she was laughing, after all.

"Now?"

Man'el's jaw gave way. It was more than ever like a dream; he began to wish he could wake up so as to be certain of it, and then go on dreaming again. The night below gave up a shape, waving ecstatic arms and screeching: "Go 'way f'm here. Git away f'm my girl! Go 'way—go home!"

They paid her no more attention than they would have paid an unseasonable insect bumbling in the night or the faint surf on the beaches.

"Now? Will you now?" Angel's eyes held him inexorably.

"W-e-l-l—ugh! *Say*, look here, what's eatin' you t'night? What's *he* done to you? *Say*, can't y' talk sensible?"

Angel's fingers plucked at his coat lapels.

"Listen! Did I ever ask him to talk about me? Did I? Did I ask him to say if I was pretty or ugly? An' if he likes yellow hair, what's that to *me*? Oh! *oh*! If I was rich and had yellow hair, then I c'd come crawlin' on my knees to 'im, could I? Oh! As if anybody 'd look at that cripple pig! Did I ask 'im if I was ugly? Oh! Oh! Oh!"

Man'el threw back his head to laugh at the stars, relieved.

"So you're ugly, eh? Ugly?" He put something out of the way with his strong arm, crying: "Leave us be, old woman. Can't y' see we're talkin'? . . . Ugly, eh? Well, I'm only a poor fellow, but if *you're* ugly, then I

want a ugly one. You're good enough for me—plenty good enough for me! Well, I should guess!"

"Don't say it that way!" she protested, fiercely. "*Not that way!*"

"Any way y' like, then!" Man'el laughed triumphantly, taking her hands in his and swinging them back and forth.

Angel could not sleep that night. She lay wide-eyed awake and sometimes shivering in her bed under the windy shingles, wondering at the strange new face of the world. Her grandmother did not even go to bed, but sat in the kitchen, rocking very slowly back and forth, peering into the coals and sucking her gums. A little before dawn she killed and dressed a pair of pullets and carried them away with her down the lane, wrapped in an old shawl. She was back before Angel was up.

"Look 't this bottle, Pretty," she said. "I got it to the drug-store, an' folks says it'll make y'r hair yellah. See. Avo got it for Pretty."

Sitting bolt up in bed, Angel stared at the bottle for a long time after the Avo had hobbled downstairs again.

"Oh, yes. I remember now."

Her anger with the Avo grew beyond bounds. She ran around the room in her bare feet, hunting for a place to break the bottle. In the end she let it drop down between the floor and the eaves, and then sat on the edge of the bed, staring at nothing.

Even the oldest crones in the neighborhood could see the difference in Angel after that, and wagged their heads and pursed their lips, for, though their eyes were dim, their wits were sharp for a thing of this kind.

What they saw in Angel was something hard, glittering, something purposeful. For a year she had been putting away nickels and pennies against the St. Michel's excursion to New Bedford in the spring, and now everybody knew,

from Evelina Silva, who worked in Matheson's store, how she spent it all one morning for a piece of yellow silk and a pair of patent-leather pumps, and the grocer boy who caught her in the kitchen one morning rubbing her cheeks hard with a rough towel did not fail to tell of it.

She couldn't fool the old women. Perhaps they were a little disappointed when she did not try. Anyone with eyes was free to see her, when Peter Um Perna came up the lane, standing slim and brazen in the doorway, "showing off" the waist she had made from the yellow silk, and those patent-leather pumps with the French heels. A spot of color like a rose-petal burned in either cheek, and the lights in the hair framing the lovely oval of her face were like blue sabers in a mist. She stared at Peter as he passed, looked him over with the bland incuriosity of a stranger till her eyes came to that brass-shod peg, when she smiled a little to herself. One could see the cords in Peter's cheeks tighten and stand out; that was all. He went on fingering his mustache and toying with the watch-chain as if he did not know she was there. How they hated each other, Angel Avellar and Peter Um Perna!

Man'el Costa wanted to laugh. He was delighted with Angel, and more and more with every passing week he wondered that he could have looked at any other girl. And yet, from time to time, a ripple of uneasiness passed across his simple soul. He spoke of it one evening in the Avo's front room, where he came to see Angel quite often now and sit on the sofa with his arm around her, oblivious to the old woman's vindictive screechings from the kitchen.

"You—you're sure y' like me, Angel? Y' ain't beginnin' t'—to—"

There was no need to finish the question; the answer was in the dark, reproachful eyes which seemed to be looking through him and beyond. She spoke after a moment in a musing tone.

"He told me I was ugly. Did I ask him? Did I ask him? Say!" She jumped up to straighten a corner of the carpet with a toe. "I tell you," she cried, wheeling on Man'el. "You want t' know what I wisht? I wisht that—that *thing* there—would come crawlin' on *his* knees—to *me*—*me*, Man'el. Just *once*, Man'el!"

Man'el stared at his finger-nails and laughed uncertainly. "I'd like t' see you *then*, Angel, old girl."

The Avo, hobbling in, held up her two shaking hands. "Look at 'em," she quavered. "All et up with the wash. An' who did I wash f'r—t' keep her soul 'n' body together? Eh? What does *she* care? Eeee! Eeee! She'd be glad if I was dead 'n' gone! Wisht I was! I wisht I was."

Angel was not the only one changed by that early winter. People said that Peter Um Perna was going crazy with his money. "'S if he didn't have enough a'ready," they said. "Don' use his head no more at all, at all."

It was quite true, he didn't use his head. For after the weathers<sup>2</sup> came on and other skippers hauled up or lay snug in their houses on the watch for fine days, Peter went out in everything. An abiding anger dwelt in him. Driving his dories overboard in a northeaster, he lost all his gear; and his crew, coming home empty-handed for their pains, refused to go again, even when he came stamping through the lanes calling them out, but had their womenfolks pull down the front shades and sat in their kitchens, grinning and ill at ease. On his way home that day Man'el Costa had stopped in at the Avo's back shed with his bunk-tick over his shoulder.

He had not counted on Angel, who met his announcement with blazing eyes. "You'd let him scare y' out, would you? You would, would you?"

Peter Um Perna grinned in an odd way when Man'el

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2. *weathers*, storms.

came after that to say he would go. They went out the day before Christmas with four Lisbon "ginnies"<sup>3</sup> harried out of a back-street boarding-house, not in the big schooner, of course, but in Peter's second craft, the *Mena*, which his uncle went dragging in through the summer. Angel went down to watch them go off from the beach in their dory. They looked tiny and shaky against the sky and water, both of a pitiless gray.

It began to snow about midnight—a soft, windless downfall, blinding at a dozen yards. The telephone-girl at the drug-store had the news before nine in the morning—the *Mena* on the bar at Plymouth, and breaking up fast with the flood tide. Yes, they had gotten the men ashore.

Word of shipwreck had run white-lipped through Old Harbor times out of mind in the past. But this Christmas day there were no white lips or eyes aching for tears, unless they were up there at the top of Nickerson's Lane, where sister Philomena stood behind the long windows and watched the people clear away their snow, limping grotesquely, putting fingers to noses, and hallooing down the dazzling passage. Philomena knew what it meant. Fate could not fool Philomena. Had she not been waiting for this? Had she not been fondling the darling fear of this disaster in the bottom of her heart? The golden spell was beginning to fade.

Angel Avellar sat in the front room at her house, chin in hand, brooding over the unseasonable flowers in the carpet.

"I'm glad," she repeated over and over. "Glad! Glad! Glad!"

That night the festival of *Menin' Jesus*<sup>4</sup> brightened all the windows along the lane, making a joyful, steep corridor, walled in, for once, from the hungry ocean and the

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3. *ginnies*, slang for *Portuguese sailors*.

4. *festival of Menin' Jesus*, Christmas. *Menin'* is the Portuguese for *Child*.

ruthless sky. There was music, too, of mandolins and island lutes,<sup>5</sup> and men chanting the "*Parcido im Belam!*"<sup>6</sup>

Avo Avellar had been hard at her housework all day, dusting and scrubbing, making her tiny altar of boards, getting out the new wheat carefully sprouted in saucers, and the candles, the bizarre little Virgin and Child, saints and cows and asses, brought with her from the islands. The wine also, in the large black bottle, was island wine.

Not many came to the Avo's—a few old gossips to mumble over the cake and wine, and three or four young fellows, shy of Angel at first till they found how the wind of her humor blew, when they all made fun of the One-Leg louder and louder as the candle-fires danced in the girl's eyes, strummed their mandolins and drank of the old woman's wine.

They fell silent of a sudden and wished they were somewhere else when Peter Um Perna stood in the doorway.

"*Bóm noite!*"<sup>7</sup> he said to the company.

Convoyed by the ecstatic Avo, he entered and took a chair before the altar. He remained as the life-crew had taken him from his doomed vessel, one sleeve split, his collar gone, and his shirt laid open at the throat. They were astounded to see him so mild, as though his losing battle with the sea had somehow rested him. For a long time he sat staring into the candle-ranks. Once he murmured, "Good cake, Avo," and again, "Good wine, old woman." He drank the wine eagerly, but seemed to forget the cake. Once he started and looked about. "Where all the folks went to?" he wondered, vaguely.

The Avo got rid of the question with a wave of her

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5. *island lutes*. A lute is a stringed instrument, something like a guitar. The *islands* (five lines below) are the Azores.

6. *Parcido im Belam*, Birth in Bethlehem.

7. *Bóm noite*, good-evening.

skinny hands, and filled his glass again. One could not help wondering at the frail old woman all through that night. Now she was at Peter Um Perna's elbow, a pervading minister; now she was in the kitchen, where the company had crowded to wait and watch and whisper, crossing her lips with a savage finger, grinning and chuckling through her gums, or shaking her fists at Angel, who remained in the front room, sitting in an angle between the altar and one of the front windows.

There was something luxurious about Angel's attitude, leaning back at her ease, and something at the same time triumphant. One could think of her as having saved up precious moments against this night, moments of deep scorn or anger, and moments of especial beauty. Now and then her lips curled slightly with her contempt, but beyond this her face remained perfectly impassive, even when Peter Um Perna looked up at her once and down again quickly with a curious flush on his cheeks.

By and by, lulled by the wine and the candle-light, he seemed to forget where he was. His face grew oddly boyish, soft, and untired—he was remembering the red tiles and the rank, sweet gardens of Fayal.<sup>8</sup>

Avo crooned a strange paean over the kitchen fire. "Drunk in my house! Drunk in my house!" Some of the old women dozed; she hustled them awake. Others wanted to go home, it was so unearthly an hour, but she held them with incredible stratagems, even standing with her feeble back against the door. The cup was not to be snatched from her lips now.

Peter was looking at Angel as though he had never seen her before. "You're pretty," he mused. "My, my, but you're pretty."

She started ever so little in her chair, then lay back and

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8. *Fayal*, one of the Azores.



covered a yawn. "Think so?" she murmured, gazing at the ceiling.

His face twitched and colored, as if for an instant he tried to pull himself together. He let himself go on again with a waving hand.

"I wished you liked me a—a little bit. If you—if you—"

"Who, *me?* Liked *you?*" The candle-light showed Angel's smooth, round neck trembling with pent laughter. It seemed incredible that this was the Angel Avellar of half a year ago. "Me like *you—you?*"

"Yeah-yeah!" He strained toward her. "If you c'd on'y like me enough t' get married with me! Couldn't you now—couldn't you?"

"Why don't y' get down onto your knees, then?"

"Yeah-yeah—wait a secon'. Yeah-yeah!"

He had forgotten that wooden peg of his; it caught between the chair-rungs and flung him down on one shoulder at Angel's feet.

The devils were loose in Angel Avellar. Leaning over the prostrate man, she seemed to drink of the gray, twitching horror on his face.

"What 'd I say?" he whispered, not yet moving.

"You crawled on your knees for me t' marry you, Peter Um Perna!"

She gazed into his eyes with a smile of sweet poison. But it was not enough; she was still thirsty. She had meant to spurn him now with a laugh, but the cornered look in his eyes gave her a far finer thrust. "And I *will* marry you, Pete One-Leg. You hear? I *will!* I *will!*"

He scrambled up with his back to the wall. He seemed dazed to find curious, exultant faces packing the kitchen door, the Avo's witnesses.

"I never!" he mumbled his denial. "I never, either!"

Angel turned and blew out the candles on the altar, showing the room cold with dawn. She shivered a little with her triumph. "Oh, well!" She shrugged her shoulders. "If you don't——" She was making sport of him, Peter, before these people. *Him! Peter Duarte!* Devils were loose somewhere else now.

"All right!" he bawled. "Come on t' the priest, *right now!*"

They studied each other's eyes. The girl's lips scarcely moved.

"You—you think I wouldn't?"

"You think *I* wouldn't?" Peter whispered, too. Then they both repeated it, wondering, almost appealing.

"You—think—I—*wouldn't?*"

"You—think—I—*wouldn't?*"

Old Harbor will forget many things before it forgets that morning of passion. Angela Avellar and Peter Um Perna were married in the yellow chapel up-street as soon as things could be got ready, still scarcely knowing what they did, driven helpless on an obscure tempest, becoming one flesh in hate. When they walked home to the Nickerson house it was between two lines of people who shouted, "Kill the cripple, old boy!" at sight of Man'el Costa, sleep and rage in his eyes, barring their path halfway up the hill. When he could not stand up before these two intolerable masks, the crowd jeered and hooted to see him ducking away from the Avo's triumphant stick.

It was after this that Man'el began to drift aimlessly from house to house, lowering and rumbling, stopping wherever they would give him the lees of last night's wine and listen to his threats.

"Like t' see 'im go fishin' t'day. Ain't so anxious t' go t'day, is he?"

They spurred him on; he grew wilder as the wine moved

him more and more. "Go fishin'! Tell 'im Man'el Costa 'll go. Take the little *Sea Bird* now—jest the two of us—man an' man. Go fishin', eh? *I'd go!* Tell 'im Man'el Costa 'd go."

A blind man would not have known there were people in the Nickerson living-room that morning even though he had sat there an hour. Sister Philomena huddled down in a far corner, clutching an ancient shawl about her frame with both hands, as if to say, "They can't take this away from me—*leastways not this!*"

Avo Avellar sat between the "children" with her chin propped on her stick. She was as motionless as the dead, except for her eyes, which went unceasingly from one to the other. She had spent herself in her one wild night, and now she was bankrupt, and content.

And all the while, for an hour, perhaps two hours, Peter and Angel stared at the same flower in the middle of the carpet.

Peter was the first to move. He got up to wander about the room at his halting gait, putting a hand on the wall here and there, standing for a long time in front of that dim Virgin between the windows.

"Make y'rself to home," he said, suddenly, with his hand on the door-latch. Angel met his eyes with a regard as colorless as his own. "I will," she said.

Philomena's fire had gone out and the room grew very cold. The Avo roused herself, mumbling, "Avo go git some o' y' things, Pretty," and hobbled out by the back way. Presently Philomena vanished, too, noiseless as a scared mouse, leaving Angel alone with the flower in the carpet.

She was not to continue so for long. The door swung open violently, discovering Philomena's face chalkier than ever and her hands clawing appeal.

"Don't let 'im go!" she screamed. "Aw, don' let 'im go. Please, girl—good, pretty girl—don' let 'im go in this!"

Angel found herself at a window with a giddy sense of having been wafted there by some mysterious violence.

"Wha-what you wa-wa-want?" she stammered.

"Don' let 'im go! Don'——" The woman's passionate drone filled her ears. She wondered with an odd detachment why the folks in the pallid sunshine outside were shrugging and grinning at the house.

"Don't keep saying that!" she cried. "Now what's the —O-oh!"

The world was leprous. Here and there on its gray skin a spot of pallor glowed and dimmed as the sun fought to keep it. A spot ran down to the Avo's palings, and another far out there at the Point lent to the Light and its out-buildings a momentary and unnatural radiance. Still farther beyond, the mainsail of a sloop slanted across the fugitive glory and passed out, as if a gray hand had reached to take it.

"Him? Mena—is that *him*?"

So this was why the people grinned. As though her ears could hear through walls and spaces, Angel caught up the words from their lips: "Left 'er on his weddin'-day! Well, well, well, well, I never!" A spot of fire showed on her cheek, regular and clear-cut, like the mark of a slap.

For a time now she made no effort to control herself. Months of hate and wounds and bitterness had their hour of bloom. Once, in the half-gloom of the upper hall, she wheeled on Philomena, who followed her everywhere like a frightened dog. "Don't let 'im go, you say? Ha-ha-ha! You make me laugh. Don't let 'im come *back*—that's what I pray on my knees to the sweet Virgin of Pity."

Her sick fury drove her from room to room. She stood

at an upper window and saw the storm getting itself together out of that vast gray yeast of the world. She saw the chimney-smudges topple for a moment and then lie down flat and thin, and she heard the first impact of the wind against the shingles overhead. And there came Avo Avellar, fighting with the wind for the bundle on her head, pathetic bits of finery done up in a pillow-case, Angel's trousseau. For the first time, seemingly, she realized that the thing was done, completed; that she could not somehow wake up and find it a nightmare.

The house became quite dark. She wanted to lie down somewhere and cover her head with blankets to keep out the sound of the wind. In the bedroom where she came a photograph of Peter stood on the bureau. She took it in her hands, tore it once across, and sinking down in a rocker by the window, remained there for a long time, holding the pieces in her hands. Her sense of helplessness deepened when she glanced down by and by and discovered the futility of her anger; the face in the picture was not touched.

It had been taken, evidently, before Peter was hurt. It carried her back to the front room at the Avo's, and the altar and the candles and this face here in her hand dreaming into the light. For here was the same look of the boy in the man, the same air of an artless and delightful indecision, of expectancy, of human accessibility.

Angel lay down on the bed and began to cry. She was so utterly worn out that she wanted to die, or to sleep, but the wind would not let her die and it would not let her sleep. The house shivered with it; the bed shivered with it. She pulled a comfort over her head, but the wind came through the feeble barrier, carrying its voices, the singing sleet, the thunder of ocean flinging on its beaches; and other voices—voices insistent, remote, and ghostly. One

crept into the room with her, wailing, "He's dead 'n' gone—dead 'n' gone—dead 'n' gone——"

It was so real that she flung off the comfort and stared about wildly. Philomena crouched in a corner, invisible save for the gray patch of her face. The burden of her wailing changed. "What 'd you make 'im go f'r? What 'd you make 'im go f'r?"

Angel lifted on her arms. "No, no, Mena! I never made him go. I never! Could *I* help it if he couldn't stand the sight o' me? *Could I*, Mena?"

"He went because *you* couldn't stan' the sight o' *him*! An' you know it, you—you terrible, wicked thing, you!"

The tempest seemed to withdraw for a moment and leave the bedroom with its two dim, gray faces hanging in a windless hush. Angel's voice seemed far off, as though there were another person speaking.

"What—you—talkin' about?"

"Dead 'n' gone, dead 'n' gone. Oh, dear, dear!" Philomena rocked from side to side. "You made 'im go in a gale o' wind. You made 'im crazy so long, so long, an' you wouldn't look at 'im because he's a cripple."

"What you talkin' about?"

"What a shame, a shame! If folks on'y knowed how good he was an' how sweet-tempered when he's alone an' nobody watchin' him. I've hear' 'im talk s' sweet it's a'most poetry. But when folks 's watchin' him, it's same's a crooked devil in Peter, an' he had t' make fun of 'em first before they made fun o' him. An' now he's dead 'n' gone, dead 'n' gone!" Angel slid from the bed and shook the woman's arm, as she might have aroused a sleeper. "But what about *me*?" she demanded.

"About you?" Philomena's voice lifted wild and sore above the gale, like a prayer for vengeance. "Why 'd you

stan' in your yard f'r two long year, then? Two year ago he come home one night an' set in front o' the fire, sayin' to himself, 'That little girl!' over 'n' over till you'd want t' laugh. You wouldn' think t' see a growed-up man cry, would you? I've see my brother cry time a-plenty, behind his four walls here. An' other times he wouldn' cry, but say: 'Na-na. She likes this here Costa boy, an' what is it t' me? F'rgit it, Peter!' An' then he'd set f'rgittin' it. What 'd you do it f'r, girl?"

"Answer *me* a question. Why'd he call me ugly that night then?"

"Answer *me* a question. Why wouldn' he eat no supper that night? An' why'd he act the way he done after you'd went, carryin' on same's a drunk man, spittin' onto his peg-leg, an' tryin' t' bust it off in the door, an' cursin' God that 'd struck 'm a cripple for pretty Angel t' make sport of? Answer *me that* question, then!"

Angel cried for pity. "Mena, you're lyin' to me!"

"Ya-ya, an' mebbly it's a lie he's went out in a forty-foot sloop-boat an' got drowned!" The finality of things seemed a tonic to the woman; disaster purged her of the old fear of disaster and gave her a shrewish malignance. "All right," she screeched. "All right! He ain't the on'y one, though. There's two went if there's one, an' now where's that pretty brown-face Man'el o' yourn? Ha-ha-ha! Ow-w! Don't do that!"

"Did Man'el go with him? Say! Quick!"

"He did. Ya-ya-ya! He did!"

Angel's face grew grayer still with a horrible misgiving. "But why? What's the reason he went?"

"Ya-ya, you can holler plenty now. There's two of us now. Hark! What's that—downstairs, poundin' on the door?" she whispered.



Angel whispered, too. "The door's locked." They had an absurd sense of being conspirators.

"It—it can't be——"

"Oh, Mena, Me-e-na, it c-c-couldn't be——"

They clung to each other, forgetting the past.

"Why don't you go, Angel?"

"You go, Mena!"

"Na-na, please *you* go!"

Angel crept down the stairs and, while the summons still continued on the door-panels, brought the lamp out from the front room, set it on the marble-top table. Being distracted, she gave an illusion of almost grotesque self-control. She spoke to the door as if the boards had ears. "Wait! Wait! I hear you! Can't you wait a second?"

She had trouble with the bolt, and even when it was undone she seemed not to know enough to pull the door, but stood in the middle of the hallway with her hands pressed against her cheeks. A hungry color swept her face when Man'el Costa came in. He laughed to see it.

"Waitin', eh?" He took off his oilskin hat and shook it, spattering on the floor. "Scared I wouldn't come back, eh, Angel, honey?"

"But—where—is—he, Man'el?"

"Oh, that's all right. Needn't be a-scared o' that now, Angel, old girl." He ripped his jacket open, blowing and elated. "Needn't be scared the One-Leg'll bother you no more, no more."

"Man'el!" Angel sat down suddenly on the bottom step of the stairs. Man'el confronted her, jubilant.

"Lucky girl—lucky, lucky girl! A swell house an' a pot o' money, an' no harm done. Who'd 've believed it, Angel? My, my! An' t' think I was sore this mornin'! But it's all right now, ain't it, old girl?"

"But, Man'el, where—is—he?"

"Ain't I told you it's all right? How d' I know where he is *now*? Las' I seen of 'im he's ridin' to an anchor between the Peaked Hill bars with the anchor draggin' all the time an' the inner bar dead astern. I come in on a freighter. They got a boat 'longside of us an' took me off. How it was breezin'! Seas comin' clean acrost us! No time to do no argyin' with *him*—no time f'r begging a man, I tell you *that*!"

"Argyin'? *Beggin'?*" Angel's hand groped and found a spindle of the banister, whitening with the grip. "Man'el, but I don't understand. Why didn't he come in with you?"

"Why? Why? How 'd I know—'less it's the reason he's went off his head—crazy's a bedbug. Settin' there into the fo'c's'le with his head in his hands, bawlin' like a baby. . . . Oh, that—that you, Mena?" A decent solemnity changed his voice at sight of Philomena's face hanging in the opening above, gray, quiet, and stricken. "It's too bad, Mena, but, Mena—I—I'm a-scared your brother——" His floundering made him nervous. "Angel," he protested, "you tell 'er!"

But Angel was gone.

From Si Nickerson's Lane it is three miles across the cape to the Peaked Hill Life-Saving Station.

They could hardly believe their eyes in the station-house—Angel seemed more a wind-driven ghost than any human wanderer, with her white lips and her vague, pleading eyes and her back against the booming panels of the door by which she had entered. For the third time now she repeated her words, very slowly and distinctly, and with a kind of desperate patience and a childlike faith that if she could just make these stubborn men understand what she wanted it would be all right.

"You see—we got to hurry—quick. Because the reason

my husband's on the bar out there. All alone in a sloop-boat, my husband is, and his anchor's draggin'. Don't you understand?"

The station captain, Ed Cook, banged his fists in growing exasperation. "You said that twict a'ready. I hear you. And I tell you your husband's safe 'n' sound at home by this time. I tell you we got a telephone from a freighter, and he took 'im off a sloop-boat out here. Can't you hear? You deaf? Took 'im off—brought 'im in—safe 'n' sound to home, now. Hear? Git me?"

"But you don't understand," she commenced all over again. "It's the *other* man's my husband. He's all alone in a sloop-boat——"

"Be sensible. You don't think they'd go t' work and take one man off a boat and leave the other!"

No. 2 man, beyond the table, lowered an eyelid and put his knuckles on his forehead. The captain, nodding understanding, got up from his chair by the stove and laid a hand on Angel's arm. An odd, new kindness was in his voice.

"It's all right, girl. We'll go out in just a few minutes, but first you got to dry your clo'es and get rested up. Better lay down a spell, hadn't you?"

"I can go along, too, though, can't I?"

"Sure thing—surest thing you know! Only first, now——"

It was curious to see the rough, literal fellows grow artful in double-dealing. They got her into the captain's office, and when she would not lie down on the sofa, but sat clinging to a seaward window-sill, they took turns sitting with her, coming out of the darkened room now and then like men relieved from a heavy wheel-watch to rub their hands over the stove and whisper about it.

"God alive!" muttered No. 5 once, "the way she talks in there you'd almost think 'twas so."

"But it ain't!" No. 3 shook the other fiercely by the wrist. "It ain't, you know."

It began to do queer things to them as the night wore on; that ceaseless, boring reiteration in the darkened room. The watches changed, the beach patrols came in blowing and flapping their "oilers,"<sup>9</sup> heard the tale, and stared curiously at the tellers. The reliefs went out, north and south, and still the clock ticked the night away, and the yeast of a strange unrest worked on in them. It was Captain Cook himself, coming out of the office with sweat standing on his forehead, who struck his fist on the table and said defensively: "We couldn't la'nch the boat in this—anyhow!"

He had failed to latch the door and it swung open behind him, giving up a voice, husky, quivering with an eagerness that would not dim: "Please—I'm dry now, ain't I? I'm rested up! Can't we go now? Because the reason we got to hurry—hurry! He'll be on to the bar in—in half an hour, I think. Oh, please——"

"Shut that door!" The captain combed his beard violently. Somewhere in the back of the room one of the men hazarded:

"It's moderatin' a trifle, by the sound, ain't it?"

The captain bawled at him, "Moderatin'!" He was gone next minute, climbing the stairs to the lookout's cupola. "Hey, Tom!" he shouted up the dark ascent, "what d' y' make?"

The steady tramping overhead ceased and a voice came down very thin against the background of the gale. "She's haulin' a bit now. Moderatin' a bit, cap'n. She'll come clear with the sun, I wouldn't wonder."

"Yeh, but that there craft offshore? Make 'er out any, Tom?"

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9. *oilers*, waterproof coats.

"Mast's away. Don't take no life aboard. They took that fellow off, y' know. She'll hit the inner-bar 'n half an hour, I should——"

"Half-hour! What makes you say a half-hour?" The captain's feet were dancing on the stair. "Gull-damn it! You heard her."

They got out of the house on tiptoe, like a band of conspirators. They had to fight the surf-boat down the bluff against a wall of wind and spray, gray-pink with the coming dawn. They caught their breath, waiting for the break of the wave, yelled all together, ran the boat out through the white smother, up to their shoulders, scrambled aboard, hauling at one another, tugging—and one that they tugged at was Angel Avellar.

"I'm rested now," she cried.

They thrust her down between two thwarts, bawling: "Shut up! Shut up!" and catching half the crest of the coming wave, slid strongly into the trough.

When they came up with the *Sea Bird*, beyond the lather of the inner bar, they found a dead thing, ready for her grave—a log, lifting and subsiding sluggishly with the swells, her decks swept clean of gear, her mast lying over the port board with the rigging swathed about it like a hank of seaweed. They rested on their oars a couple of fathoms from her side, just keeping their heads up to the sea, and set up a desultory hailing. They began to feel more than ever idiotic; the inevitable revulsion set in. One shouted, "Le's get out o' this!" and others, "That's right! Fools, the lot of us!"

The captain feathered the stern-sweep, waiting for the break to swing the boat inshore. He tried to avoid Angel's eyes, two thwarts away, and when he failed he scowled glumly at her, grumbling:

"Look what y' done!"

It made no impression on her. She turned her eyes

across the little strip of water and back to him, smiling, half wistful, half joyous. "He's waitin' for us."

Swinging the boat's head in with an angry jerk, he cried: "Climb aboard then, an' get it off your mind and over with. Heave 'er aboard there, boys!"

Very cautiously she disappeared within the companion-way of the tiny fore-castle. They waited, holding on and fending off with their boat-hooks, afraid to meet one another's eyes, grumbling, "'S too bad—too bad."

The wrack over the water grew lighter and changed imperceptibly from pink to a pale lemon, and still they waited, not knowing what to do, till Ed Cook protested, "By Heaven! that's about enough o' *this*," and got himself over the sloop's taffrail. He teetered forward and bent down to peer into the black hole, and then, turning half around, he sat down in a heap on the house and took off his hat. "And jus' to *think*!" he wondered, "jus' to *think*!"

Angel's voice came out to him, insistent and faintly querulous, as though she tried to wake a sleeper. "Peter, Peter—look at me, Peter! Didn't you know I liked you always—ever since—ever since—— Oh, Peter, Peter!—not to know *that*! Peter, look at me!"

Another voice was shallow and bewildered, like the sleeper awakened.

"Wh'—why—Angel! That little girl!" He must have been touching her with his incredulous hands, down there in the gloomy place, for the next words were: "Why, you—you're *really*! But—but what you doin' down here, An-Angel?"

"Can't you see, Peter? Can't you see?" There was an inexpressible triumph in the cry. "I'm down on my knees, Peter!"

The dawn came with a rush now, striking through the mists with its keen, level blades, cutting them away in vast, high-curling slices, letting in the blue sky.

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS

"Down on Their Knees" was first published in *Harper's Magazine*, July, 1916.

1. The place and the people represented in "Down on Their Knees" are familiar material in the stories of Wilbur Daniel Steele. The scene is the same as that in the older "local color" stories of the New England coast (as in Sarah Orne Jewett's *Deephaven*, 1883, for example); but the fishermen and coast dwellers in Steele's stories are the newer Portuguese settlers from the Azores, whose presence on the New England coast in large numbers is significant of the changing racial conditions of American life. Notice the contrast between the older and the newer settlers as it is stated in the first paragraph.

Steele chooses these people as the characters of his stories because through them he can give expression to a variety of deep, simple emotions. Unhindered by the conventions of people in a higher social position, these characters express what they really feel. Notice the contrast between them and the characters in "The Nature of an Oath" when you read that story (page 251).

2. It is difficult to make a story interesting without representing a conflict. What is said in the Introduction about the function of conflict in the short story? (Page xvii.) How is the conflict between love and pride presented in "Down on Their Knees"? Why is the love of Peter and Angel represented for so long as hatred? Why does each wish the other to knuckle under? How many times is "down on their knees" used in the story? When is it first used? Why do both Peter and Angel surrender at the end?

3. Is the main interest in the story found in the actions of the characters or in their feelings? What part does emotion play in "Down on Their Knees"? Is the story romantic or realistic?

4. Is the impression of the story weak or likely to be lasting with you? Does the author show an understanding of the characters' feelings? Is he sympathetic toward them?

5. Collect all the evidence you can to show that Steele cares greatly for form and style.

6. By consulting the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* (see page 342) determine the number of stories Steele published in 1923 and in 1924. In what magazines have his stories appeared?



*Suggested Reading.*—A story by Steele may be found in every issue of O'Brien's *Best Short Stories* from 1915 to 1922. Other romantic stories: *Ghitza and Other Romances of Gypsy Life* by Konrad Bercovici; *Contact* by Frances N. Hart; "The Lubbeny Kiss" by Louise Rice (O. Henry, 1919). Stories of the New England coast: *Cape Cod Folks* by Joseph Lincoln.

*Biographical Note.*—Wilbur Daniel Steele was born at Greensboro, North Carolina, March 17, 1886; moved to Colorado as a child; was graduated from the University of Denver in 1907. He later studied art in New York and Paris. He now lives at Nantucket, Massachusetts. Steele's first volume, *Storm* (a novel), was published in 1914. Two volumes of his short stories have been published since that date.

## MARY SMITH\*

BOOTH TARKINGTON

Henry Millick Chester, rising early from intermittent slumbers, found himself the first of the crowded Pullman to make a toilet in the men's smoke-and-wash-room, and so had the place to himself—an advantage of high dramatic value to a person of his age and temperament, on account of the mirrors which, set at various angles, afford a fine view of the profile. Henry Millick Chester, scouring cinders and stickiness from his eyes and rouging his ears with honest friction, enriched himself of this too unfamiliar opportunity. He smiled and was warmly interested in the result of his smile in reflection, particularly in some pleasant alterations it effected upon an outline of the cheek usually invisible to the bearer. He smiled graciously, then he smiled sardonically. Other smiles he offered—the tender smile, the forbidding smile, the austere and the seductive, the haughty and the pleading, the mordant and the compassionate, the tolerant but incredulous smile of a man of the world, and the cold, ascetic smile that shows a woman that her shallow soul had been read all too easily—pastimes abandoned only with the purely decorative application of shaving lather to his girlish chin. However, as his unbeetling brow was left unobscured, he was able to pursue his physiognomical researches and to produce for his continued enlightenment a versatile repertory of frowns—the stern, the quizzical, the bitter, the treacherous, the bold, the agonized, the inquisitive, the ducal, and the frown of

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the husband who says: "I forgive you. Go!" A few minutes later Mr. Chester, abruptly pausing in the operation of fastening his collar, bent a sudden passionate interest upon his right forearm, without apparent cause and with the air of never having seen it until that moment.

He clenched his fingers tightly, producing a slight stringiness above the wrist, then crooked his elbow with intensity, noting this enormous effect in all the mirrors. Regretfully, he let his shirt-sleeves fall and veil the rare but private beauties just discovered, rested his left hand negligently upon his hip, extended his right in a gesture of flawlessly aristocratic grace, and, with a slight inclination of his head, uttered aloud these simple but befitting words: "I thank ye, my good people." T' yoong Maister was greeting the loyal tenantry who acclaimed his return to Fielding Manor, a flowered progress thoroughly incomprehensible to the Pullman porter whose transfixed eye—glazed upon an old-gold face intruded through the narrow doorway—Mr. Chester encountered in the glass above the nickeled wash-basins. The Libyan<sup>1</sup> withdrew in a cloud of silence, and t' yoong Maister, flushing somewhat, resumed his toilet with annoyed precision and no more embroidery. He had yesterday completed his sophomore year; the brushes he applied to his now adult locks were those of a junior. And with a man's age had come a man's cares and responsibilities. Several long years had rolled away since for the last time he had made himself sick on a train in a club-car orgy of cubebs and sarsaparilla pop.

Zigzagging through shoe-bordered aisles of sleepers in morning dishevelment, he sought the dining-car, where the steward escorted him to an end table for two. He would have assumed his seat with that air of negligent hauteur

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1. *Libyan*, i.e., African. In ancient geography the name *Libya* denoted Africa, excluding Egypt.

which was his chosen manner for public appearances had not the train, taking a curve at high speed, heaved him into the undesirable embrace of an elderly man breakfasting across the aisle. "Keep your feet, sonny; keep your feet," said this barbarian, little witting that he addressed a member of the nineteen-something prom. committee. People at the next table laughed genially and Mr. Chester, uttering a word of hostile apology, catapulted into his assigned place, his cheeks hot with the triple outrage.

He relieved himself a little by the icy repulsion with which he countered the cordial advances of the waiter, who took his order and wished him a good-morning, hoped he had slept well, declared the weather delightful, and, unanswered, yet preserved his beautiful courtesy unimpaired. When this humble ambassador had departed on his mission to the kitchen, Henry Millick Chester, unwarrantably persuaded that all eyes were searching his every inch and angle—an impression not uncharacteristic of his years—gazed out of the window with an indifference which would have been obtrusive if any of the other breakfasters had happened to notice it. The chill exclusiveness of his expression was a rebuke to such prying members of the proletariat as might be striving to read his thoughts, and barred his fellow passengers from every privilege to his consideration. The intensely reserved gentleman was occupied with interests which were the prerequisites of only his few existing peers in birth, position, and intelligence, none of whom, patently, were in that car.

He looked freezingly upon the abashed landscape, which fled in shame; nor was that wintry stare relaxed when the steward placed someone opposite him at the little table. Nay, our frosty scholar now intensified the bleakness of his isolation, retiring quite to the pole in reproof of this too close intrusion. He resolutely denied the existence of his

vis-à-vis,<sup>2</sup> refused consciousness of its humanity, even of its sex, and then inconsistently began to perspire with the horrible impression that it was glaring at him fixedly. It was a dreadful feeling. He felt himself growing red, and coughed vehemently to afford the public an explanation of his change of color. At last, his suffering grown unendurable, he desperately turned his eyes full upon the newcomer. She was not looking at him at all, but down at the edge of the white cloth on her own side of the table; and she was the very prettiest girl he had ever seen in his life.

She was about his own age. Her prettiness was definitely extreme, and its fair delicacy was complete and without any imperfection whatever. She was dressed in pleasant shades of tan and brown. A brown veil misted the rim of her hat, tan gloves were folded back from her wrists; and they, and all she wore, were fresh and trim and ungrimed by the dusty journey. She was charming. Henry Millick Chester's first gasping appraisal of her was perfectly accurate, for she was a peach—or a rose, or anything that is dewy and fresh and delectable. She was indeed some smooth. She was the smoothest thing in the world, and the world knows it!

She looked up.

Henry Millick Chester was lost.

At the same instant that the gone feeling came over him, she dropped her eyes again to the edge of the table. Who can tell if she knew what she had done?

The conversation began with appalling formalities, which preluded the most convenient placing of a sugar bowl and the replenishing of an exhausted salt cellar. Then the weather, spurned as the placative offering of the gentle waiter, fell from the lips of the princess in words of diamonds and rubies and pearls. Our Henry took up the

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2. *vis-à-vis*, the person sitting opposite one.

weather where she left it; he put it to its utmost; he went forward with it, prophesying weather; he went backward with it, recalling weather; he spun it out and out, while she agreed to all he said, until this overworked weather got so stringy that each obscurely felt it to be hideous. The thread broke; fragments wandered in the air for a few moments, but disappeared; a desperate propriety descended, and they fell into silence over their eggs.

Frantically Mr. Chester searched his mind for some means to pursue the celestial encounter. According to the rules, something ought to happen that would reveal her as Patricia Beekman, the sister of his roommate, Schuyler Beekman, and tonight he should be handing the imperturbable Dawkins a wire to send: "My dear Schuyler, I married your sister this afternoon." But it seemed unlikely, because his roommate's name was Jake Schmulze, and Jake lived in Cedar Rapids; and, besides this train wasn't from or going to Palm Beach—it was going to St. Louis eventually, and now hustled earnestly across the placid and largely unbutlered plains of Ohio.

Often—as everyone knows—people have been lost to each other forever through the lack of a word, and few have realized this more poignantly than our Henry, as he helplessly suffered the precious minutes to accumulate vacancy. True, he had thought of something to say; yet he abandoned it. Probably he was wiser to wait, as what he thought of saying was: "Will you be my wife?" It might seem premature, he feared.

The strain was relieved by a heavenly accident which saved the life of romance, near perishing at birth. That charming girl, relaxing slightly in her chair, made some small, indefinite, and entirely ladylike movement of restfulness that reached its gentle culmination upon the two feet of Mr. Chester, which, obviously mistaken for struc-

tural adjuncts of the table, were thereby glorified and became beautiful on the mountains. He was not the man to criticize the remarkable ignorance of dining-car table architecture thus displayed, nor did he in any wise resent being mistaken up to the ankles for metal or wood. No. The light pressure of her small heels hardly indented the stout toes of his brown shoes; the soles of her slippers reposed upon his two insteps, and rapture shook his soul to its foundations, while the ineffable girl gazed lustroously out of the window, the clear serenity of her brilliant eyes making plain her complete unconsciousness of the nature of what added to her new comfort.

A terrific blush sizzled all over him, and to conceal its visible area he bent low to his coffee. She was unaware. He was transfigured. Glamour diffused itself about her, sprayed about them both like showers of impalpable gold-dust, and filled the humble dining-car—it filled the whole world. Transformed, seraphic waiters passed up and down the aisle in a sort of obscure radiance. A nimbus hovered faintly above the brown veil; a sacred luminosity was exhaled by the very tablecloth, where an angel's painted fingers drummed absently.

It would be uncharitable to believe that a spirit of retaliation inspired the elderly and now replete man across the aisle, and yet, when he rose, he fell upon the neck of Henry as Henry had fallen upon his, and the shock of it jarred four shoes from the acute neighborliness of their juxtaposition. The accursed graybeard, giggling in his senility, passed on; but that angel leaped backward in her chair while her beautiful eyes, wide open, stunned, her beautiful mouth, wide open, incredulous, gave proof that horror can look bewitching.

"Murder!" she gasped. "Were those your feet?"

And as he could compass no articulate reply, she grew



pink as he murmured inaudibly, and stared at him in wider and wilder amazement.

"It—it didn't hurt," he finally managed to stammer.

At this she covered her blushes with her two hands and began to gurgle and shake with laughter. She laughed and laughed and laughed. It became a paroxysm. He laughed, too, because she laughed. Other passengers looked at them and laughed. The waiters laughed; they approved—colored waiters always approve of laughter—and a merry spirit went abroad in the car.

At last she controlled herself long enough to ask:

"But what did you think of me?"

"It—it didn't hurt," he repeated idiotically, to his own mortification, for he passionately aspired to say something airy and winsome; but as he couldn't think of anything like that, he had to let it go. "Oh, not at all," he added feebly.

However, "though not so deep as a well," it served, 'twas enough, for she began to laugh again, and there loomed no further barrier in the way of acquaintance. Therefore it was pleasantly without constraint, and indeed as a matter of course, that he dropped into a chair beside her half an hour later, in the observation car; and something in the way she let the *Illustrated London News* slide into the vacant chair on the other side of her might have suggested that she expected him.

"I was still wondering what you must have thought of me."

This gave him an opportunity, because he had thought out a belated reply for the first time she had said it. Hence, quick as a flash, he made the dashing rejoinder:

"It wasn't so much what I thought of you, but what I thought of myself—I thought I was in heaven!"

She must have known what pretty sounds her laughter made. She laughed a great deal. She even had a way of

laughing in the middle of some of her words, and it gave them a kind of ripple. There are girls who naturally laugh like that; others learn to; a few won't; and some can't. It isn't fair to the ones that can't.

"But you oughtn't to tell me that," she said.

It was in the middle of "oughtn't" that she rippled. A pen cannot express it, neither can a typewriter, and no one has yet invented a way of writing with a flute; but the effect on Henry shows what a wonderful ripple it was. Henry trembled. From this moment she had only to ripple to make Henry tremble. Henry was more in love than he had been at breakfast. Henry was a goner.

"Why oughtn't I to?" he demanded with white intensity. "If anything's true it's right to tell it, isn't it? I believe that everybody has a right to tell the truth, don't you?"

"Ye-es—"

"You take the case of a man that's in love," said this rather precipitate gentleman; "isn't it right for him to—"

"But suppose," she interrupted, becoming instantly serious with the introduction of the great topic, "suppose he isn't really in love. Don't you think there are very few cases of people truly and deeply caring for each other?"

"There are men," he said firmly, "who know how to love truly and deeply, and could never in their lives care for anybody but the one woman they have picked out. I don't say all men feel that way; I don't think they do. But there are a few that are capable of it." The seats in an observation car are usually near neighbors, and it happened that the brown cuff of a tan sleeve, extended reposefully on the arm of her chair, just touched the back of his hand, which rested on the arm of his. This ethereally light contact continued. She had no apparent cognizance of it, but a vibrant thrill passed through him, and possibly quite a hearty little fire might have been built under him without

his perceiving good cause for moving. He shook, gulped, and added: "I am!"

"But how could you be sure of that," she said thoughtfully, "until you tried?" And as he seemed about to answer, perhaps too impulsively, she checked him with a smiling, "At your age!"

"You don't know how old I am. I'm older than you!"

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-one next March."

"What day?"

"The seventh."

"That is singular!"

"Why?"

"Because," she began in a low tone and with full recognition of the solemn import of the revelation, "because my birthday is only one day after yours. I was twenty years old the eighth of last March."

"By George!" The exclamation came from him, husky with awe. There was a fateful silence.

"Yes, I was born on the eighth," she said slowly.

"And me on the seventh!" At such a time no man is a purist.

"It is strange," she said.

"Strange! I came into the world just one day before you did!"

They looked at each other curiously, deeply stirred. Coincidence could not account for these birthdays of theirs, nor chance for their meeting on a train "like this." Henry Millick Chester was breathless. The mysteries were glimpsed. No doubt was possible—he and the wondrous creature at his side were meant for each other, intended from the beginning of eternity.

She dropped her eyes slowly from his, but he was satisfied that she had felt the marvel precisely as he had felt it.

"Don't you think," she said gently, "that a girl has seen more of the world at twenty than a man?"

Mr. Chester well wished to linger upon the subject of birthdays; however, the line of original research suggested by her question was alluring also. "Yes—and no," he answered with admirable impartiality. "In some ways, yes. In some ways, no. For instance, you take the case of a man that's in love—"

"Well," interrupted the lady, "I think, for instance, that a girl understands men better at twenty than men do women."

"It may be," he admitted, nodding. "I like to think about the deeper things like this sometimes."

"So do I. I think they're interesting," she said with that perfect sympathy of understanding which he believed she was destined to extend to him always and in all things. "Life itself is interesting. Don't you think so?"

"I think it's the most interesting subject there can be. Real life, that is, though—not just on the surface. Now, for instance, you take the case of a man that's in—"

"Do you go in much for reading?" she asked.

"Sure. But as I was saying, you take—"

"I think reading gives us so many ideas, don't you?"

"Yes. I get a lot out of it. I—"

"I do, too. I try to read only the best things," she said. "I don't believe in reading everything, and there's so much to read nowadays that isn't really good."

"Who do you think," he inquired with deference, "is the best author now?"

It was not a question to be settled quite offhand; she delayed her answer slightly, then with a gravity appropriate to the literary occasion, temporized:

"Well, since Victor Hugo is dead, it's hard to say just who is the best."

"Yes, it is," he agreed. "We get that in the English course in college. There aren't any great authors any more. I expect probably Swinburne's<sup>3</sup> the best."

She hesitated. "Perhaps; but more as a poet."

He assented. "Yes, that's so. I expect he would be classed more as a poet. Come to think of it, I believe he's dead, too. I'm not sure, though; maybe it was Beerbohm Tree<sup>4</sup>—somebody like that. I've forgotten; but anyway, it doesn't matter. I didn't mean poetry; I meant who do you think writes the best books? Mrs. Humphry Ward?"<sup>5</sup>

"Yes, she's good, and so's Henry James."<sup>6</sup>

"I've never read anything by Henry James. I guess I'll read some of his this summer. What's the best one to begin on?"

The exquisite pink of her cheeks extended its area almost imperceptibly. "Oh, any one. They're all pretty good. Do you care for nature?"

"Sure thing," he returned quickly. "Do you?"

"I love it!"

"So do I. I can't give astronomy a whole lot, either."

She turned a softly reproachful inquiry upon him. "Oh, don't you love to look at the stars?"

In horror lest the entrancing being think him a brute, he responded with breathless haste: "Oh, rath-er-r! To look at 'em, sure thing! I meant astronomy in college; that's mostly math, you know—just figures. But stars to look at—of course that's different. Why, I look up at 'em for hours sometimes!" He believed what he was saying. "I look up at 'em, and think and think and think and think—"

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3. *Swinburne*, Algernon Charles (1837-1909), the English poet.

4. *Beerbohm Tree*, the English actor (1853-1917).

5. *Mrs. Humphry Ward*, English novelist, not of the first rank.

6. *Henry James*, an American novelist and short-story writer (1843-1916). He lived for many years in England and became a British subject in 1914.

"So do I." Her voice was low and hushed; there was something holy in the sound of it, and a delicate glow suffused her lovely, upraised face—like that picture of Saint Cecilia,<sup>7</sup> he thought. "Oh, I love the stars! And music—and flowers—"

"And birds," he added automatically in a tone that, could it by some miracle have been heard at home, would have laid his nine-year-old brother flat on the floor in a might-be mortal swoon.

A sweet warmth centered in the upper part of his diaphragm and softly filtered throughout him. The delicious future held no doubts or shadows for him. It was assured. He and this perfect woman had absolutely identical tastes; their abhorrences and their enthusiasms marched together; they would never know a difference in all their lives to come. Destiny unrolled before him a shining pathway which they two would walk hand-in-hand through the summer days to a calm and serene autumn, respected and admired by the world, but finding ever their greatest and most sacred joy in the light of each other's eyes—that light none other than the other could evoke.

Could it be possible, he wondered, that he was the same callow boy who but yesterday pranced and exulted in the "peerade" of the new juniors! How absurd and purposeless that old life seemed; how far away, how futile, and how childish! Well, it was over, finished. By this time tomorrow he would have begun his business career.

Back in the old life, he had expected to go through a law school after graduating from college, and subsequently to enter his father's office. That meant five years before even beginning to practice, an idea merely laughable now. There was a men's furnishing store on a popular corner at home;

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7. *picture of Saint Cecilia*, by the Italian painter Raphael (1483-1520). The painting is of the patron saint of music, and shows her listening to the angelic choir above her.

it was an establishment which had always attracted him, and what pleasanter way to plow the road to success than through acres of variously woven fabrics, richly colored silks, delicate linens, silver mountings and odorous leathers in congenial association with neckties, walking-sticks, hosiery, and stickpins? He would be at home a few hours hence, and he would not delay. After lunch he would go boldly to his father and say: "Father, I have reached man's estate and I have put away childish things. I have made up my mind upon a certain matter and you will only waste time by any effort to alter this, my firm determination. Father, I here and now relinquish all legal ambitions, for the reason that a mercantile career is more suited to my inclinations and my abilities. Father, I have met the one and only woman I can ever care for, and I intend to make her my wife. Father, you have always dealt squarely with me; I will deal squarely with you. I ask you the simple question: Will you or will you not advance me the funds to purchase an interest in Paul H. Hoy & Company's Men's Outfitting Establishment? If you will not, then I shall seek help elsewhere."

Waking dreams are as swift, sometimes, as the other kind—which, we hear, thread mazes so labyrinthine "between the opening and closing of a door"; and a twenty-year-old lance, fermenting in the inclosure of a six-and-seven-eighths plaid cap, effervesces with a power of sizzling and sparkling and popping.

"I believe I love music best of all," said the girl dreamily.

"Do you play?" he asked, and his tone and look were those of one who watches at the sick-bed of a valued child.

"Yes, a little."

"I love the piano." He was untroubled by any remorse for what he and some of his gang had done only two days



since to a previously fine instrument in his dormitory entry. He had forgotten the dead past in his present vision, which was of a luxurious ghastly abyss of loneliness disclosed by the possibility of losing her. But this was only the darkest moment before a radiance that shot heavenward like the flaming javelins of an equatorial sunrise.

Her eyes lowered slowly till the long, brown lashes shadowed the rose-colored cheek and the fall of her glance came to rest upon the arms of their two chairs, where the edge of her coat sleeve just touched the knuckle of his little finger. Two people were passing in front of them; there was no one who could see; and with a lightning-swift impulse she turned her wrist for a half second, while his heart stopped beating, touched all his fingers with her own, then as quickly withdrew her hand and turned as far away from him as the position of her chair permitted.

It was a caress of incredible brevity, and so fleeting, so airy, that it was little more than a touch of light itself, like the faint quick light from a flying star one might just glimpse on one's hand as it passed. But in our pleasant world important things have resulted from touches as evanescent as that. Nature has its uses for the ineffable.

Blazing with glory, dumb with rapture, Henry Millick Chester felt his heart rebound to its work, while his withheld breath upheaved in a gulp that half suffocated him. Thus, blinded by the revelation of the stupefying beauty of life, he sat through a heaven-stricken interval, and time was of no moment. Gradually he began to perceive, in the midst of the effulgence which surrounded the next chair like a bright mist, the adorable contour of a shoulder in a tan coat and the ravishing outline of a rosy cheek that belonged to this divine girl who was his.

By and by he became dreamily aware of other objects beyond that cheek and that shoulder, of a fat man and his

fat wife on the opposite side of the car near the end. Unmistakably they were man and wife, but it seemed to Henry that they had no reason to be—such people had no right to be married. They had no obvious right to exist at all; certainly they had no right whatever to exist in that car. Their relation to each other had become a sickening commonplace, the bleakness of it as hideously evident as their overfed convexity. It was visible that they looked upon each other as inevitable nuisances which had to be tolerated. They were horrible. Had Love ever known these people? It was unthinkable! For lips such as theirs to have pronounced the name of the god would have been blasphemy; for those fat hands ever to have touched, desecration! Henry hated the despicable pair.

All at once his emotion changed: he did not hate them; he pitied them. From an immense height he looked down with compassion upon their wretched condition. He pitied everybody except himself and the roseate being beside him; they floated together upon a tiny golden cloud, alone in the vast sky at an immeasurable altitude above the squalid universe. A wave of pity for the rest of mankind flooded over him, but most of all he pitied that miserable, sodden, beffeshed old married couple.

He was dimly aware of a change that came over these fat people, a strangeness; but he never did realize that at this crisis his eyes, fixed intently upon them and aided by his plastic countenance, had expressed his feelings and sentiments regarding them in the most lively and vivid way. For at the moment when the stout gentleman laid his paper down, preparatory to infuriated inquiry, both he and his wife were expunged from Henry's consciousness forever and were seen of him thenceforth no more than if they had been ether, and not solid flesh. The exquisite girl

had been pretending to pick a thread out of her left sleeve with her right hand—but now at last she leaned back in her chair and again turned her face partly toward Henry. Her under lip was caught in slightly beneath her upper teeth, as if she had been doing something that possibly she oughtn't to be doing, and though the pause in the conversation had been protracted—it is impossible to calculate how long—her charming features were still becomingly overspread with rose. She looked toward her rapt companion, not at him, and her eyes were preoccupied, tender, and faintly embarrassed.

The pause continued.

He leaned a little closer to her. And he looked at her and looked at her and looked at her. At intervals his lips moved as if he were speaking, and yet he was thinking wordlessly. Leaning thus toward her, his gaze and attitude had all the intensity of one who watches a ninth-inning tie in the deciding game of a championship series. And as he looked and looked and looked, the fat man and his wife, quite unaware of their impalpability, also looked and looked and looked in grateful fascination.

“Did you—” Henry Millick Chester finally spoke these words in a voice he had borrowed, evidently from a stranger, for it did not fit his throat and was so deep that it disappeared—it seemed to fall down a coal-hole and ended in a dusty choke. “Did you—” he began again, two octaves higher, and immediately squeaked out. He said “Did you” five times before he subjugated the other two words.

“Did you—mean that?”

“What?” Her own voice was so low that he divined rather than heard what she said. He leaned even a little closer—and the fat man nudged his wife, who elbowed his

thumb out of her side morbidly—she wasn't missing anything.

"Did you—did you mean that?"

"Mean what?"

"That!"

"I don't know what you mean."

"When you—when you—oh, you know!"

"No, I don't."

"When you—when you took my hand."

"I!"

With sudden, complete self-possession she turned quickly to face him, giving him a look of half-shocked, half-amused astonishment.

"When I took your hand?" she repeated incredulously. "What are you saying?"

"You—you know," he stammered. "A while ago when—when—you—you—"

"I didn't do anything of the kind!" Impending indignation began to cloud the delicate face ominously. "Why in the world should I?"

"But you—"

"I didn't!" She cut him off sharply. "I couldn't. Why, it wouldn't have been nice! What made you dream I would do a thing like that? How dare you imagine such things!"

At first dumfounded, then appalled, he took the long, swift, sickening descent from his golden cloud with his mouth open, but it snapped tight at the bump with which he struck the earth. He lay prone, dismayed, abject. The lovely witch could have made him believe anything; at least it is the fact that for a moment she made him believe he had imagined that angelic little caress; and perhaps it was the sight of his utter subjection that melted her. For she flashed upon him suddenly with a dazing smile, and then, blushing again, but more deeply than before, her

whole attitude admitting and yielding, she offered full and amazing confession, her delicious laugh rippling tremendously throughout every word of it.

"It must have been an accident—partly!"

"I love you!" he shouted.

The translucent fat man and his wife groped for each other feverishly, and a colored porter touched Henry Millick Chester on the shoulder.

"Be in Richmon' less'n fi' minutes now," said the porter. He tapped the youth's shoulder twice more; it is his office to awaken the rapt dreamer. "Richmon', In'iana, less'n fi' minutes," he repeated more slowly.

Henry gave him a stunned and disheveled "What?"

"You get off Richmon', don't you?"

"What of it? We haven't passed Dayton yet."

"Yessuh, lon' 'go. Pass' Dayton eight-fifty. Be in Richmon' mighty quick now."

The porter appeared to be a malicious liar. Henry appealed pitifully to the girl.

"But we haven't passed Dayton?"

"Yes, just after you sat down by me. We stopped several minutes."

"Yessuh. Train don't stop no minutes in Richmon' though," said the porter with a hard laugh, waving his little broom at some outlying freight cars they were passing. "Gittin' in now. I got you' bag on platfawm."

"I don't want to be brushed," Henry said, almost sobbing. "For heaven's sake, get out!"

Porters expect anything. This one went away solemnly without even lifting his eyebrows.

The brakes were going on.

One class of railway tragedies is never recorded, though it is the most numerous of all and fills the longest list of heartbreaks; the statistics ignore it, yet no train ever leaves

its shed, or moves, that is not party to it. It is time and overtime that the safety-device inventors should turn their best attention to it, so that the happy day may come at last when we shall see our common carriers equipped with something to prevent these lovers' partings.

The train began to slow down.

Henry Millick Chester got waveringly to his feet; she rose at the same time and stood beside him.

"I am no boy," he began, hardly knowing what he said, but automatically quoting a fragment from his forthcoming address to his father. "I have reached man's estate and I have met the only—" He stopped short with an exclamation of horror.

"You—you haven't even told me your name!"

"My name?" the girl said, a little startled.

"Yes! And your address!"

"I'm not on my way home now," she said. "I've been visiting in New York and I'm going to St. Louis to make another visit."

"But your name!"

She gave him an odd glance of mockery, a little troubled.

"You mightn't like my name!"

"Oh, please, please!"

"Besides, do you think it's quite proper for me to—"

"Oh, please! To talk of that now! Please!" The train had stopped.

The glint of a sudden decision shone in the lovely eyes. "I'll write it for you so you won't forget."

She went quickly to the writing desk at the end of the compartment, he with her, the eyes of the fat man and his wife following them like two pairs of searchlights swung by the same mechanism.

"And where you live," urged Henry. "I shall write to you every day." He drew a long, deep breath and threw

back his head. "Till the day—the day when I come for you."

"Don't look over my shoulder." She laughed shyly, wrote hurriedly upon a loose sheet, placed it in an envelope, sealed the envelope, and then, as he reached to take it, withheld it tantalizingly. "No. It's my name and where I live, but you can't have it. Not till you've promised not to open it until the train is clear out of the station."

Outside the window sounded the twice-repeated "Aw! aboh-oh," and far ahead a fatal bell was clanging.

"I promise," he gulped.

"Then take it!"

With a strange, new-born masterfulness he made a sudden impetuous gesture and lifted both the precious envelope and the fingers that inclosed it to his lips. Then he turned and dashed to the forward end of the car where a porter remained untipped as Henry leaped from the already rapidly moving steps of the car to the ground. Instantly the wonderful girl was drawn past him, leaning and waving from the railed rear platform whither she had run for this farewell. And in the swift last look that they exchanged there was in her still-flushing, lovely face a light of tenderness and of laughter, of kindness and of something like a fleeting regret.

The train gained momentum, skimming onward and away, the end of the observation car dwindling and condensing into itself like a magician's disappearing card, while a white handkerchief, waving from the platform, quickly became an infinitesimal shred of white—and then there was nothing. The girl was gone.

Probably Henry Millick Chester owes his life to the fact that there are no gates between the station building and the tracks of Richmond. For the gates and a ticket-clipping official might have delayed Henry's father in the barely



successful dash he made to drag from the path of a back-ing local a boy wholly lost to the outward world in a state of helpless puzzlement, which already threatened to become permanent as he stared and stared at a sheet of railway notepaper whereon was written in a charming hand:

MARY SMITH

CHICAGO

ILL.

### NOTES AND QUESTIONS

"Mary Smith" was first published in *The Saturday Evening Post*, August 17, 1912.

1. From very slight material Booth Tarkington has made the story "Mary Smith." The story is almost without plot. It is concerned with the trivial and accidental meeting of a boy and a girl on a railway train. The affair actually makes little difference in the life of either of the principals (as Mary Smith more fully realizes than does Henry), but the disappointment of the boy is so real to him at the end of the story that his world seems to have crumbled to pieces. Tarkington suggests with some sadness and with much good humor the great contrast between the highly romantic disposition of Henry and the actual reality of the world. This he does with no bitterness, but with a wistfulness that would seize and hold this lovely turn of youthful nature, which he realizes must pass with the coming years. He is as gentle in his quest for this innocence and openness of youth as if he were trying to paint the elusive shimmer of running water.

2. As a portrayer of youthful American life Booth Tarkington has no equal today. The "teen age" is his particular field of fiction, that elusive dream time when the small happenings of an ordinary day take on tragic importance. The adventures of the hero to be found in the usual boy story are generally only the happenings of a material nature and do not get to the heart of youth as Tarkington has been able to probe and express it.

3. Notice the intentionally inflated style used to express simple facts. Write out at least three examples of this practice in "Mary Smith." Why does the author use such a style, and why does he employ as many words as he does to say a simple thing?

4. Why does the name *Mary Smith* have the power to cause a crisis in Henry's life? Why did Tarkington choose a train as the scene of the story? Why are the old lady and the old gentleman introduced into the story? What is the intention of the literary conversation between Mary Smith and Henry (page 100)? (See the footnotes on page 100.)

5. Is it more difficult or is it easier to write a story in the light vein of "Mary Smith" or a story of a grim, tragic nature? Explain. Did you guess the ending of the story? At what point?

6. Assemble examples of deep observations upon human nature that give the story a meaning beyond the mere narration of its happenings.

*Suggested Reading.*—Other Tarkington stories of youth: *Penrod*; *Penrod and Sam*; *Seventeen* (short stories loosely joined into a continuous narrative). Other stories of youth: *The Court of Boyville* by William Allen White; "Possessing Prudence" by Amy Wentworth Stone (in *Atlantic Narratives*, First Series).

*Biographical Note.*—Newton Booth Tarkington was born in Indianapolis in 1869. He attended Purdue University and Princeton. The honorary degrees of M.A. (1899) and Litt.D. (1918) have been conferred upon him by Princeton. His first published novel, *The Gentleman from Indiana*, appeared in 1899. This has been followed by a long series of novels, plays, and short stories, some of which (the novels *Alice Adams* and *The Magnificent Ambersons*, for example) deal searchingly with important aspects of American life as they appear in the Middle West.

## LONG, LONG AGO\*

FREDERICK ORIN BARTLETT

When the brakeman swung back the door and with resonant indifference shouted in Esperanto<sup>1</sup> "Granderantal stashun," Galbraithe felt like jumping up and shaking the man's hand. It was five years since he had heard that name pronounced as it should be pronounced, because it was just five years since he had resigned from the staff of a certain New York daily and left to accept the editorship of a Kansas weekly. These last years had been big years, full of joy of hard work, and though they had left him younger than when he went, they had been five years away from New York. Now he was back again for a brief vacation, eager for a sight of the old crowd.

When he stepped from the train he was confused for a moment. It took him a second to get his bearings, but as soon as he found himself fighting for his feet in the dear old stream of commuters, he knew he was at home again. The heady jostle among familiar types made him feel that he had not been gone five days, although the way the horde swept past him proved that he had lost some of his old-time skill and cunning in a crowd. But he did not mind; he was here on a holiday, and they were here on business and had their rights. He recognized every mother's son of them. Neither the young ones nor the old ones were a day older. They wore the same clothes, carried the same bundles, and passed the same remarks. The solid business man weighted

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1. *Esperanto*, an artificial language intended for communication among all nations. Used humorously here to characterize the jargon of trainmen. The brakeman was calling "Grand Central Station."

with the burden of a Long Island estate was there; the young man in a broker's office who pushed his own lawn mower at New Rochelle<sup>2</sup> was there; the man who got aboard at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street was there. There was the man with a Van Dyke, the man with a mustache, and the fat, smooth-shaven man, and the wives, the sisters, and the stenographers of all these. They were just as Galbraithe had left them—God bless 'em.

Swept out upon Forty-second Street, he took a long, full breath. The same fine New York sky was overhead (the same which roofed Kansas, and the same New York sun shone down upon him, even as in its gracious bounty it shone upon Kansas). The thrill of it made him realize as never before that, though the intervening years had been good to him, New York was in his blood. His eyes seized upon the raw, angular buildings as eagerly as an exiled hill-man greets friendly mountain peaks. There are no buildings on earth which look so friendly, once a man gets to know them, as those about the Grand Central. Galbraithe noticed some new structures, but even these looked old. The total effect was exactly as he had left it. That was what he appreciated after his sojourn among the younger cities of the West. New York was permanent—as fixed as the pole star. It was unalterable.

Galbraithe scorned to take cab, car, or bus this morning. He wanted to walk—to feel beneath his feet the dear old humpy pavement. It did his soul good to find men repairing the streets in the same old places—to find as ever new buildings going up and old buildings coming down, and the sidewalks blocked in the same old way. He was clumsy at his hurdling, but he relished the exercise.

He saw again with the eyes of a cub reporter every tin-

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2. *New Rochelle*, a town in Westchester County, New York, seventeen miles northeast of New York City, a less pretentious residence place than Long Island.

gling feature of the stirring street panorama, from gutter to roof top, and thrilled with the magic and vibrant bigness of it all. Ant-like, men were swarming everywhere bent upon changing, and yet they changed nothing. That was what amazed and comforted him. He knew that if he allowed five years to elapse before returning to his home town in Kansas he wouldn't recognize the place, but here everything was as he had left it, even to the men on the corners, even to the passers-by, even to the articles in the store windows. Flowers at the florist's, clothing at the haberdasher's, jewels at the jeweler's, were in their proper places, as though during the interval nothing had been sold. It made him feel as eternal as the Wandering Jew.<sup>3</sup>

Several familiar landmarks were gone, but he wondered if they had ever been. He did not miss them—hardly noticed any change. New buildings fitted into the old niches as perfectly as though from the first they had been ordained for those particular spots. They did not look at all the upstarts that all new buildings in Kansas did.

He hurried on to Park Row, and found himself surrounded by the very newsboys he had left. Not one of them had grown a day older. The lanky one and the lame one and the little one were there. Perhaps it was because they had always been as old as it is possible for a boy to be that they were now no older. They were crying the same news to the same indifferent horde scurrying past them. Their noisy shouting made Galbraithe feel more than ever like a cub reporter. It was only yesterday that his head was swirling with the first mad excitement of it.

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3. *Wandering Jew*. Tradition says that Cartaphilus, the door-keeper of the judgment hall, who was in the service of Pontius Pilate, struck our Lord as he led him forth, saying "Get on! Faster, Jesus!" Whereupon Jesus replied, "I am going, but tarry thou till I come again." He was cursed by the decree never to die, but to wander incessantly. Every hundred years, the legend tells, he falls into a trance, out of which he rises again at the age of thirty.

Across the street the door stood open through which he had passed so many times. Above it he saw the weather-beaten sign which had always been weatherbeaten. The little brick building greeted him as hospitably as an open fire at home. He knew every inch of it, from the outside sill to the city room, and every inch was associated in his mind with some big success or failure. If he came back as a vagrant spirit a thousand years from now he would expect to find it just as it was. A thousand years back this spot had been foreordained for it. Lord! the rooted stability of this old city.

He had forgotten that he no longer had quarters in town, and must secure a room. He was still carrying his dress-suit case, but he couldn't resist the temptation of first looking in on the old crowd and shaking hands. He hadn't kept in touch with them except that he still read religiously every line of the old sheet, but he had recognized the work of this man and that, and knew from what he had already seen that nothing inside any more than outside could be changed. It was about nine o'clock; so he would find Hartson, the city editor, going over the rival morning papers, his keen eyes alert to discover what the night staff had missed.

As he hurried up the narrow stairs his heart was as much in his mouth as it had been the first day he was taken on the staff. Several new office boys eyed him suspiciously, but he walked with such an air of familiarity that they allowed him to pass unquestioned. At the entrance to the sacred precinct of the city editor's room he paused with all his old-time hesitancy. Even after working five years for himself as a managing editor, he found he had lost nothing of his wholesome respect for Hartson. The latter's back was turned when Galbraithe entered, and he

waited at the rail until the man looked up. Then with a start Galbraith saw that this was not Hartson at all.

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered.

"Well?" demanded the stranger.

"I expected to find Mr. Hartson," explained Galbraith.

"Hartson?"

"I used to be on the staff, and——"

"Guess you're in the wrong office," the stranger shut him off abruptly.

For a moment Galbraith believed this was possible, but every scarred bit of furniture was in its place and the dusty clutter of papers in the corner had not been disturbed. The new city editor glanced suspiciously toward Galbraith's dress-suit case and reached forward as though to press a button. With flushed cheeks Galbraith retreated and hurried down the corridor toward the reportorial rooms. He must find Billy Bertram and get the latter to square him with the new city editor. He made at once for Billy Bertram's desk, with hand extended. Just beyond was the desk he himself had occupied for so long. Bertram looked up—and then Galbraith saw that it was not Bertram at all.

"What can I do for you, old man?" the stranger inquired. He was a fellow of about Bertram's age and a good deal of Bertram's stamp.

"I'm looking for Billy Bertram," stammered Galbraith. "Guess he must have shifted his desk."

He glanced hopefully at the other desks in the room, but he did not recognize a face.

"Bertram?" inquired the man who occupied Bertram's desk. He turned to the man next to him.

"Say, Green, anyone here by the name of Bertram?" Green lighted a fresh cigarette and shook his head.

"Never heard of him," he replied indifferently.



"He used to sit here," explained Galbraithe.

"I've held down this chair fifteen months, and before me a chump by the name of Weston had that honor. Can't go back any further than that."

Galbraithe lowered his dress-suit case and wiped his forehead. Everyone in the room took a suspicious glance at the bag.

"Ever hear of Sanderson?" Galbraithe inquired of Green.

"Nope."

"Ever hear of Wadlin or Jerry Donahue or Cartwright?"

Green kicked a chair toward him.

"Sit down, old man," he suggested. "You'll feel better in a minute."

"Ever hear of Hartson? Ever hear of old Jim Hartson?"

"That's all right," Green encouraged him. "If you have a line in that bag you think will interest us, bring it out. It's against office rules, but——"

Galbraithe tried to recall if, on his way downtown, he had inadvertently stopped anywhere for a cocktail. He had no recollection of so doing. Perhaps he was a victim of a mental lapse—one of those freak blank spaces of which the alienists were talking so much lately. He made one more attempt to place himself. In his day he had been one of the star reporters of the staff.

"Ever hear of—of Galbraithe?" he inquired anxiously.

By this time several men had gathered around the two desks as interested spectators. Galbraithe scanned their faces, but he didn't recognize one of them.

"Haven't got a card about your person, have you?" inquired Green.

"Why, yes," answered Galbraithe, fumbling for his case.

The group watched him with some curiosity, and Harding, the youngest man, scenting a story, pushed to the front. With so many eyes upon him Galbraithe grew so confused that he couldn't find his card case.

"I'm sure I had it with me," he apologized.

"Remember where you were last night?" inquired Green.

"Just got in this morning," answered Galbraithe. "I—here it is."

He drew out a card and handed it to Green. The group gathered closer and read it.

"Harvey L. Galbraithe, Trego County Courier."

Green solemnly extended his hand.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Galbraithe. Up here on business, or pleasure?"

"I used to work here," explained Galbraithe. "I came up on a vacation to see the boys."

"Used to work on this sheet?" exclaimed Green, as though doubting it.

"I left five years ago," answered Galbraithe.

"Holy smoke!" exclaimed Green, with a low whistle. "You are sure some old-timer. Let's see—that's over fifteen hundred days ago. When did you come on?"

"Just before the Spanish War," answered Galbraithe eagerly. "Hartson sent me to Cuba."

Harding came closer, his eyes burning with new interest.

"Gee," he exclaimed, "those must have been great days. I ran across an old-codger at the Press Club once who was with Dewey at Manila."

He spoke as Galbraithe might speak of the Crimean War.<sup>4</sup> He pressed the latter for details, and Galbraithe, listening to the sound of his own voice, allowed himself to be led on. When he was through he felt toothless and as though his hair had turned gray.

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4. *the Crimean War* (1853-1856) was fought between the allied forces of Turkey, France, and Great Britain against Russia.

"Those were the happy days," exclaimed Harding. "The game was worth playing then—eh, old man?"

"Yes," mumbled Galbraithe. "But don't any of you know what has become of Hartson?"

"Haydon would probably remember him——"

"Haydon?" broke in Galbraithe. "Is he here?"

He looked wistfully about the room to the corner where the exchange editor used to sit.

"He died last spring," said Green. "Guess he was the last leaf on the tree."

"He came on five years ahead of me," said Galbraithe. "He and I did the barrel murders together."

"What was that story?" inquired Harding.

Galbraithe looked at Harding to make sure this was not some fool joke. At the time nothing else had been talked of in New York for a month, and he and Haydon had made something of a name for themselves for the work they did on it. Harding was both serious and interested—there could be no doubt about that.

The details were as fresh in Galbraithe's mind as though it were yesterday. But what he was just beginning to perceive was that this was so because he had been away from New York. To those living on here and still playing the old game that story had become buried, even as tradition, in the multiplicity of subsequent stories. These younger men who had superseded him and his fellows, already had their own big stories. They came every day between the dawn and the dark, and then again between the dark and the dawn. Day after day they came unceasingly, at the end of a week dozens of them, at the end of a month hundreds, at the end of a year thousands. It was fifteen hundred days ago that he had been observing the manifold complications of these million people, and since that time a thousand volumes had been written about as many trage-

dies enacted in the same old setting. Time here was measured in hours, not years. The stage alone remained unchanged.

Galbraith made his feet, so dazed that he faltered as with the palsy. Harding took his arm.

"Steady, old man," he cautioned. "You'd better come out and have a drink."

Galbraith shook his head. He felt sudden resentment at the part they were forcing upon him.

"I'm going back home," he announced.

"Come on," Harding encouraged him. "We'll drink to the old days, eh?"

"Sure," chimed in Green. The others, too, rose and sought their hats.

"I won't," replied Galbraith, stubbornly, "I'm going back home, I tell you. And in ten years I'll be twenty-five years younger than any of you."

He spoke with some heat. Harding laughed, but Green grew sober. He placed his hand on Galbraith's arm.

"Right," he said. "Get out, and God bless you, old man."

"If only Haydon had been here——" choked Galbraith.

"I expect he's younger than any of us," replied Green, soberly. "He's measuring time by eternities."

Galbraith picked up his bag.

"S'long," he said.

He moved toward the door, and the entire group stood stock-still and without a word watched him go out. He moved along the narrow corridor and past the city editor's room. He went down the old stairs, his shoulders bent and his legs weak. Fifteen hundred days were upon his shoulders. He made his way to the street, and for a moment stood there with his ears buzzing. About him swarmed the same newsboys he had left five years before,

looking no older by a single day. Squinting his eyes, he studied them closely. There was Red Mick, but as he looked more carefully he saw that it was not Red Mick at all. It was probably Red Mick's younger brother. The tall one, the lanky one, and the little lame one were there, but their names were different. The drama was the same, the setting was the same, but fifteen hundred days had brought a new set of actors to the same old parts. It was like seeing Shakespeare with a new cast, but the play was older by centuries than any of Shakespeare's.

Galbraithe hailed a taxi.

"Granderantal stashun," he ordered.

Peering out of the window, he watched the interminable procession on the street and sidewalks. He gazed at the raw angular buildings—permanent and unalterable. Overhead a Kansas sun shone down upon him—the same which in its gracious bounty shone down upon New York.

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS

"Long, Long Ago" was first published in *The Bellman*, January 11, 1919.

1. The theme of this story is a contrast of localities—the city against the small town. The point of view of the story is whimsically different from the usual belief that in the big city, with its expanding territory and rapid building, things change quickly. Galbraithe's experience is to the contrary. The city is unchanging and unvarying. Its life is a continuous performance of the same acts. Only the actors change. And they change with inhuman speed.

2. "Long, Long Ago" is a short story of a single situation, or an extended anecdote. Plot development is almost entirely lacking. The type was made popular by O. Henry twenty years ago. Notice the brevity of the story by way of contrast with the length of "The Fat of the Land" or "According to the Code" (pages 134 and 163).

3. Is there time for character portrayal or plot development? Why are the characters in the newspaper office intentionally left undistinguished from each other? What has this to do with the theme?

4. How is the theme of the story expressed in the fifth paragraph? How many times is it repeated in the story? Is it exaggerated? What proportion of the narrative is devoted to action; what proportion to comment by the author; what proportion to dialogue?

5. Can you find a story of this type in a current magazine? Why would "Long, Long Ago" fail to serve as the leading story in a popular magazine? (See the Introduction, page xxiv.)

*Suggested Reading.*—"A Lickpenny Lover," "The Girl and the Habit" by O. Henry; "The Man Who Cursed the Lillies" by C. T. Jackson (O. Henry, 1921); "The Tribute" by H. A. Kniffier (O. Henry, 1921).

*Biographical Note.*—Frederick Orin Bartlett was born at Haverhill, Massachusetts, in 1876. He was engaged in newspaper work in Boston from 1900 to 1906. Mr. Bartlett is the author of a large number of short stories and plays, chiefly comedies. Among his best known plays are *The Wall Street Girl*, 1916, and *The Triflers*, 1917. His residence is now in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

## GOLD-MOUNTED GUNS\*

F. R. BUCKLEY

Evening had fallen on Longhorn City, and already, to the south, an eager star was twinkling in the velvet sky, when a spare, hard-faced man slouched down the main street and selected a pony from the dozen hitched beside Tim Geogehan's general store. The town, which in the daytime suffered from an excess of eye-searing light in its open spaces, confined its efforts at artificial lighting to the one store, the one saloon, and its neighbor, the Temple of Chance; so it was from a dusky void that the hard-faced man heard himself called by name.

"Tommy!" a subdued voice accosted him.

The hard-faced man made, it seemed, a very slight movement, a mere flick of the hand, at his low-slung belt; but it was a movement perfectly appraised by the man in the shadows.

"Wait a minute!" the voice pleaded.

A moment later, his hands upraised, his pony's bridle-reins caught in the crook of one arm, a young man moved into the zone of light that shone bravely out through Tim Geogehan's back window.

"Don't shoot," he said, trying to control his nervousness before the weapon unwaveringly trained on him. "I'm—a friend."

For perhaps fifteen seconds the newcomer and the hard-

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headed man examined each other with the unwinking scrutiny of those who take chances of life and death. The younger, with that lightning draw fresh in his mind, noted the sinister droop of a gray mustache over a hidden mouth, and shivered a little as his gaze met that of a pair of steel-blue eyes. The man with the gun saw before him a rather handsome face, marred, even in this moment of submission, by a certain desperation.

"What do you want?" he asked, tersely.

"Can I put my hands down?" countered the other.

The lean man considered.

"All things bein' equal," he said, "I think I'd rather you'd first tell me how you got round to callin' me Tommy. Been askin' people in the street?"

"No," said the boy. "I only got into town this afternoon, an' I ain't a fool anyway. I seen you ride in this afternoon, and the way folks backed away from you made me wonder who you was. Then I seen them gold-mounted guns of yours, an' of course I knew. Nobody ever had guns like them but Pecos Tommy. I could ha' shot you while you was gettin' your horse if I'd been that way inclined."

The lean man bit his mustache.

"Put 'em down. What do you want?"

"I want to join you."

"You want to *what*?"

"Yeah, I know it sounds foolish to you, mebbe," said the young man. "But, listen—your side-kicker's in jail down in Rosewell. I figured I could take his place—anyway, till he got out. I know I ain't got any record, but I can ride, an' I can shoot the pips<sup>1</sup> out of a ten-spot at ten

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1. *pips*, slang for *spots*. Here it has reference to the ten designs on a ten-spot of any suit of playing cards.

paces, an'—I got a little job to bring into the firm, to start with."

The lean man's gaze narrowed.

"Have, eh?" he asked, softly.

"It ain't anythin' like you go in for as a rule," said the boy, apologetically, "but it's a roll of cash, an'—I guess it'll show you I'm straight. I only got on to it this afternoon. Kind of providential I should meet you right now."

The lean man chewed his mustache. His eyes did not shift.

"Yeah," he said, slowly. "What you quittin' punchin'" for?"

"Sick of it."

"Figurin' robbin' trains is easier money?"

"No," said the young man, "I ain't. But I like a little spice in life. They ain't none in punchin'."

"Got a girl?" asked the lean man.

The boy shook his head. The hard-faced man nodded reflectively.

"Well, what's the job?" he asked.

The light from Geogehan's window was cut off by the body of a man who, cupping his hands about his eyes, stared out into the night, as if to locate the buzz of voices at the back of the store.

"If you're goin' to take me on," said the young man, "I can tell you while we're ridin' toward it. If you ain't—why, there's no need to go no further."

The elder slipped back into its holster the gold-mounted gun he had drawn, glanced once at the obscured window and again, piercingly, at the boy whose face now showed white in the light of the rising moon. Then he turned his pony and mounted. "Come on," he commanded.

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2. *punchin'*, i.e., cow-punching, or cattle-herding.

Five minutes later the two had passed the limits of the town, heading for the low range of hills which encircled it to the south—and Will Arblaster had given the details of his job to the unemotional man at his side.

“How do you know the old guy’s got the money?” came a level question.

“I saw him come out of the bank this afternoon, grinnin’ all over his face an’ stuffin’ it into his pants-pocket,” said the boy. “An’ when he was gone, I kind of inquired who he was. His name’s Sanderson, an’ he lives in this yer cabin right ahead a mile. Looked kind of a soft old geezer—kind that’d give up without any trouble. Must ha’ been quite some cash there, judgin’ by the size of the roll. But I guess when *you* ask him for it, he won’t mind lettin’ it go.”

“I ain’t goin’ to ask him,” said the lean man. “This is your job.”

The boy hesitated.

“Well, if I do it right,” he asked, with a trace of tremor in his voice, “will you take me along with you sure?”

“Yeah—I’ll take you along.”

The two ponies rounded a shoulder of the hill; before the riders there loomed, in the moonlight, the dark shape of a cabin, its windows unlighted. The lean man chuckled.

“He’s out.”

Will Arblaster swung off his horse.

“Maybe,” he said, “but likely the money ain’t. He started off home, an’ if he’s had to go out again, likely he’s hid the money some place. Folks know *you’re* about. I’m goin’ to see.”

Stealthily he crept toward the house. The moon went behind a cloud-bank, and the darkness swallowed him. The lean man, sitting his horse, motionless, heard the rap of

knuckles on the door—then a pause, the rattle of the latch. A moment later there came the heavy thud of a shoulder against wood—a cracking sound, and a crash as the door went down. The lean man's lip tightened. From within the cabin came the noise of one stumbling over furniture, then the fitful fire of a match illumined the windows. In the quiet, out there in the night, the man on the horse, twenty yards away, could hear the clumping of the other's boots on the rough board floor, and every rustle of the papers that he fumbled in his search. Another match scratched and sputtered, and then, with a hoarse cry of triumph, was flung down. Running feet padded across the short grass and Will Arblaster drew up panting.

"Got it!" he gasped. "The old fool! Put it in a tea-canister right on the mantelshelf. Enough to choke a horse! Feel it!"

The lean man, unemotional as ever, reached down and took the roll of money.

"Got another match?" he asked.

Willie struck one, and panting, watched while his companion, moistening a thumb, ruffled through the bills.

"Fifty tens," said the lean man. "Five hundred dollars. Guess I'll carry it."

His cold blue eyes turned downward, and focused again with piercing attention on the younger man's upturned face. The bills were stowed in a pocket of the belt right next one of those gold-mounted guns which, earlier in the evening, had covered Willie Arblaster's heart. For a moment, the lean man's hand seemed to hesitate over its butt; then, as Willie smiled and nodded, it moved away. The match burned out.

"Let's get out of here," the younger urged; whereupon the hand which had hovered over the gun-butt grasped Will Arblaster's shoulder.

"No, not yet," he said quietly, "not just yet. Get on your hawss, an' set still awhile."

The young man mounted. "What's the idea?"

"Why!" said the level voice at his right. "This is a kind of novelty to me. Robbin' trains, you ain't got any chance to see results, like; this here's different. Figure this old guy'll be back pretty soon. I'd like to see what he does when he finds his wad's gone. Ought to be amusin'!"

Arblaster chuckled uncertainly.

"Ain't he liable to——"

"He can't see us," said the lean man with a certain new cheerfulness in his tone. "An' besides, he'll think we'd naturally be miles away; an' besides that, we're mounted, all ready."

"What's that?" whispered the young man, laying a hand on his companion's arm.

The other listened.

"Probably him," he said. "Now stay still."

There were two riders—by their voices, a man and a girl.

They were laughing as they approached the rear of the house, where, roughly made of old boards, stood Pa Sander-son's substitute for a stable. They put up the horses; then their words came clearer to the ears of the listeners, as they turned the corner of the building, walking toward the front door.

"I feel mean about it, anyhow," said the girl's voice. "You going on living here, Daddy, while——"

"Tut-tut-tut!" said the old man. "What's five hundred to me? I ain't never had that much in a lump, an' shouldn't know what to do with it if I had. 'Sides, your Aunt Elviry didn't give it you for nothin'. 'If she wants to go to college,' says she, 'let her prove it by workin'. I'll pay half, but she's got to pay t'other half.' Well, you worked, an'—— Where on earth did I put that key?"

There was a silence, broken by the grunts of the old man as he contorted himself in the search of his pockets; and then the girl spoke. The tone of her voice was the more terrible for the restraint she was putting on it.

"Daddy—the—the—did you leave the money in the house?"

"Yes. What is it?" cried the old man.

"Daddy—the door's broken down, and——"

There was a hoarse cry. Boot-heels stumbled across the boards, and again a match flared. Its pale light showed a girl standing in the doorway of the cabin, her hands clasped on her bosom—while beyond the wreckage of the door a bent figure with silver hair tottered away from the mantelshelf. In one hand Pa Sanderson held the flickering match, in the other a tin box.

"Gone!" he cried in his cracked voice. "Gone!"

Willie Arblaster drew a breath through his teeth and moved uneasily in his saddle. Instantly a lean, strong hand, with a grip like steel, fell on his wrist and grasped it. The man behind the hand chuckled.

"Listen!" he said.

"Daddy—Daddy—don't take on so—please don't," came the girl's voice, itself trembling with repressed tears. There was a scrape of chair-legs on the floor as she forced the old man into his seat by the fireplace. He hunched there, his face in his hands, while she struck a match and laid the flame to the wick of the lamp on the table. As it burned up she went back to her father, knelt by him, and threw her arms about his neck.

"Now, now, now!" she pleaded. "Now, Daddy, it's all right. Don't take on so. It's all right."

But he would not be comforted.

"I can't replace it!" cried Pa Sanderson, dropping trembling hands from his face. "It's gone! Two years

you've been away from me; two years you've slaved in a store; and now I've——"

"Hush, hush!" the girl begged. "Now, Daddy—it's all right. I can go on working, and——"

With a convulsive effort, the old man got to his feet. "Two years more slavery, while some skunk drinks your money, gambles it—throws it away!" he cried. "Curse him! Whoever it is, curse him! Where's God's justice? What's a man goin' to believe when years of scrapin' like your aunt done, an' years of slavin' like yours in Laredo there, an' all our happiness today can be wiped out by a thief in a minute?"

The girl put her little hand over her father's mouth.

"Don't, Daddy," she choked. "It only makes it worse. Come and lie down on your bed, and I'll make you some coffee. Don't cry, Daddy darling. Please."

Gently, like a mother with a little child, she led the heart-broken old man out of the watchers' line of vision, out of the circle of lamplight. More faintly, but still with heart-rending distinctness, the listeners could hear the sounds of weeping.

The lean man sniffed, chuckled, and pulled his bridle.

"Some circus!" he said appreciatively. "C'mon, boy."

His horse moved a few paces, but Will Arblaster's did not. The lean man turned in his saddle.

"Ain't you comin'?" he asked.

For ten seconds, perhaps, the boy made no answer. Then he urged his pony forward until it stood side by side with his companion's.

"No," he said. "An'—I ain't goin' to take that money, neither."

"Huh?" The voice was slow and meditative.

"Don't know as ever I figured what this game meant," he said. "Always seemed to me that all the hardships was



on the stick-up man's side—gettin' shot at an' chased and so on. Kind of fun, at that. Never thought 'bout—old men cryin'."

"That ain't my fault," said the lean man.

"No," said Will Arblaster, still very slowly. "But I'm goin' to take that money back. You didn't have no trouble gettin' it, so you don't lose nothin'."

"Suppose I say I won't let go of it?" suggested the lean man with a sneer.

"Then," snarled Arblaster, "I'll blow your head off an' take it! Don't move, you! I've got you covered. I'll take the money out myself."

His revolver muzzle under his companion's nose, he snapped open the pocket of the belt and extracted the roll of bills. Then, regardless of a possible shot in the back, he swung off his horse and shambled, with the mincing gait of the born horseman, into the lighted doorway of the cabin. The lean man, unemotional as ever, sat perfectly still, looking alternately at the cloud-dappled sky and at the cabin, from which now came a murmur of voices harmonizing with a strange effect of joy, to the half-heard bass of the night-wind.

It was a full ten minutes before Will Arblaster reappeared in the doorway alone, and made, while silhouetted against the light, a quick movement of his hand across his eyes, then stumbled forward through the darkness toward his horse. Still the lean man did not move.

"I'm—sorry," said the boy as he mounted. "But——"

"I ain't," said the lean man quietly. "What do you think I made you stay an' watch for, you young fool?"

The boy made no reply. Suddenly the hair prickled on the back of his neck and his jaw fell.

"Say," he demanded hoarsely at last, "ain't you Pecos Tommy?"

The lean man's answer was a short laugh. •

"But you got his guns, an' the people in Longhorn all kind of fell back!" the boy cried. "If you ain't him, who are you?"

The moon had drifted from behind a cloud and flung a ray of light across the face of the lean man as he turned it, narrowed-eyed, toward Arblaster. The pallid light picked out with terrible distinctness the grim lines of that face—emphasized the cluster of sun-wrinkles about the corners of the piercing eyes and marked as if with under-scoring black lines the long sweep of the fighting jaw.

"Why," said the lean man dryly, "I'm the sheriff that killed him yesterday. Let's be ridin' back."

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS

"Gold-mounted Guns" was first published in *The Red Book* for March, 1922. It was given the prize by the Award Committee of the Society of Arts and Sciences for the best short story of fewer than three thousand words published in an American magazine in 1922.

1. Like "Long, Long Ago," "Gold-mounted Guns" is an anecdotal short story, with the same sort of keen choice of effective details to bring out sharply and quickly an interesting situation. This story, furthermore, makes use of the surprise or trick ending, which has been a familiar device in American short stories of the past half-century. It was extensively used by O. Henry. An unexpected and carefully concealed ending prevents the situation from turning out in a conventional and an obvious manner. In the course of such stories, the author sometimes prepares the way for the solution of the situation by throwing in veiled suggestions that you may grasp—but only if you have been attentive and alert in your reading. In a measure the author has deliberately thrown you off the track unless you have been keen to prevent his covering the trail. Perhaps, in reading "Gold-mounted Guns," you did not guess the identity of the sheriff before it was known

by Arblaster. Reread the story and indicate the evidence which the author gave you to show that the sheriff was no highwayman.

2. The familiar setting of the conventional Western story appears in "Gold-mounted Guns": the ranch cabin; bold bandits and their business of robbery; pistols and murder; a lonely girl in distress. The manner of life represented in this once popular fiction is rapidly disappearing, and the romantic representation of it has almost ceased in the present-day short story. In the peculiar twist given this story at its end we have, indeed, a satire upon the old blood-and-thunder Western story. The wistful boy seeking a misdirected adventure is no genuine "bad man"; he turns out to be merely a boy who cannot bear to see someone else in distress. And the sheriff is the kind teacher who takes this opportunity to impress upon his young companion a good lesson.

In form, setting, and spirit "Gold-mounted Guns" carries on the O. Henry tradition. A part of O. Henry's satire, clothed in a pleasing humor, was directed toward showing that in the open spaces of the West, where gun play abounded, the same emotions ruled mankind that impelled the dwellers in crowded cities.

3. How is irony conveyed through the remark of the sheriff (page 126), "Yeah—I'll take you along?" What is the double meaning implied in "take"? Why did the sheriff accompany the would-be bandit on his expedition? In what state is the scene of the story laid?

4. Why does the author choose to omit the details of the scene in the cabin when Will Arblaster returns the money? Under what unusual circumstances does the exposition of the story of the girl and her father take place? How is Will Arblaster made to appear real at the end of the story?

5. How does the use of dialect help produce the proper atmosphere for the story?

*Suggested Reading.*—Western stories of the conventional type: *West Is West* by Eugene M. Rhodes (1917); *Meet Mr. Stegg* by Kennett Harris (1920). Western stories by O. Henry: "The Hiding of Black Bill"; "Lost on Dress Parade"; "The Caballero's Way"; "The Furnished Room."

*Biographical Note.*—Frederic Robert Buckley was born and educated in England; he now owns a farm in Connecticut. He has specialized in novelette-length stories. His first full-length novel, *The Sage Hen*, is soon to be published.

## "THE FAT OF THE LAND"\*

ANZIA YEZIERSKA

In an air-shaft so narrow that you could touch the next wall with your bare hands, Hanneh Breineh leaned out and knocked on her neighbor's window.

"Can you loan me your wash-boiler for the clothes?" she called.

Mrs. Pelz threw up the sash.

"The boiler? What's the matter with yours again? Didn't you tell me you had it fixed already last week?"

"A black year on him, the robber, the way he fixed it! If you have no luck in this world, then it's better not to live. There I spent out fifteen cents to stop up one hole, and it runs out another. How I ate out my gall bargaining with him he should let it down to fifteen cents! He wanted yet a quarter, the swindler. *Gottuniu!* My bitter heart on him for every penny he took from me for nothing!"

"You got to watch all those swindlers, or they'll steal the whites out of your eyes," admonished Mrs. Pelz. "You should have tried out your boiler before you paid him. Wait a minute till I empty out my dirty clothes in a pillow-case; then I'll hand it to you."

Mrs. Pelz returned with the boiler and tried to hand it across to Hanneh Breineh, but the soap-box refrigerator on the window-sill was in the way.

"You got to come in for the boiler yourself," said Mrs. Pelz.

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"Wait only till I tie my Sammy on to the high-chair he shouldn't fall on me again. He's so wild that ropes won't hold him."

Hanneh Breineh tied the child in the chair, stuck a pacifier in his mouth, and went in to her neighbor. As she took the boiler Mrs. Pelz said:

"Do you know Mrs. Melker ordered fifty pounds of chicken for her daughter's wedding? And such grand chickens! Shining like gold! My heart melted in me just looking at the flowing fatness of those chickens."

Hanneh Breineh smacked her thin, dry lips, a hungry gleam in her sunken eyes.

"Fifty pounds!" she gasped. "It ain't possible. How do you know?"

"I heard her with my own ears. I saw them with my own eyes. And she said she will chop up the chicken livers with onions and eggs for an appetizer, and then she will buy twenty-five pounds of fish, and cook it sweet and sour with raisins, and she said she will bake all her shtrudels<sup>1</sup> on pure chicken fat."

"Some people work themselves up in the world," sighed Hanneh Breineh. "For them is America flowing with milk and honey. In Savel<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Melker used to get shriveled up from hunger. She and her children used to live on potato peelings and crusts of dry bread picked out from the barrels; and in America she lives to eat chicken, and apple shtrudels soaking in fat."

"The world is a wheel always turning," philosophized Mrs. Pelz. "Those who were high go down low, and those who've been low go up higher. Who will believe me here in America that in Poland I was a cook in a banker's house? I handled ducks and geese every day. I used to

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1. *shtrudels* (or *strudels*), fruit rolls in very thin pastry  
 2. *Savel*, probably a fictitious name for a town in Poland.

bake coffee-cake with cream so thick you could cut it with a knife."

"And do you think I was a nobody in Poland?" broke in Hanneh Breineh, tears welling in her eyes as the memories of her past rushed over her. "But what's the use of talking? In America money is everything. Who cares who my father or grandfather was in Poland? Without money I'm a living dead one. My head dries out worrying how to get for the children the eating a penny cheaper."

Mrs. Pelz wagged her head, a gnawing envy contracting her features.

"Mrs. Melker had it good from the day she came," she said begrudgingly. "Right away she sent all her children to the factory, and she began to cook meat for dinner every day. She and her children have eggs and buttered rolls for breakfast each morning like millionaires."

A sudden fall and a baby's scream, and the boiler dropped from Hanneh Breineh's hands as she rushed into her kitchen, Mrs. Pelz after her. They found the high-chair turned on top of the baby.

"*Gevalt!* Save me! Run for a doctor!" cried Hanneh Breineh as she dragged the child from under the high-chair. "He's killed! He's killed! My only child! My precious lamb!" She shrieked as she ran back and forth with the screaming infant.

Mrs. Pelz snatched little Sammy from the mother's hands.

"*Meshugneh!* What are you running around like a crazy, frightening the child? Let me see. Let me tend to him. He ain't killed yet." She hastened to the sink to wash the child's face, and discovered a swelling lump on his forehead. "Have you a quarter in your house?" she asked.

"Yes, I got one," replied Hanneh Breineh, climbing on

a chair. "I got to keep it on a high shelf where the children can't get it."

Mrs. Pelz seized the quarter Hanneh Breineh handed down to her.

"Now pull your left eyelid three times while I'm pressing the quarter, and you will see the swelling go down."

Hanneh Breineh took the child again in her arms, shaking and cooing over it and caressing it.

"Ah-ah-ah, Sammy! Ah-ah-ah-ah, little lamb! Ah-ah-ah, little bird! Ah-ah-ah-ah, precious heart! Oh, you saved my life; I thought he was killed," gasped Hanneh Breineh, turning to Mrs. Pelz. "*Oi-i!*" she sighed, "a mother's heart! Always in fear over her children. The minute anything happens to them all life goes out of me. I lose my head and I don't know where I am any more."

"No wonder the child fell," admonished Mrs. Pelz. "You should have a red ribbon or red beads on his neck to keep away the evil eye. Wait. I got something in my machine-drawer."

Mrs. Pelz returned, bringing the boiler and a red string, which she tied about the child's neck while the mother proceeded to fill the boiler.

A little later Hanneh Breineh again came into Mrs. Pelz's kitchen, holding Sammy in one arm and in the other an apron full of potatoes. Putting the child down on the floor, she seated herself on the unmade kitchen-bed and began to peel the potatoes in her apron.

"Woe to me!" sobbed Hanneh Breineh. "To my bitter luck there ain't no end. With all my other troubles, the stove got broke. I lighted the fire to boil the clothes, and it's to get choked with smoke. I paid rent only a week ago, and the agent don't want to fix it. A thunder should strike him! He only comes for the rent, and if anything has to be fixed, then he don't want to hear nothing.



"Why comes it to me so hard?" went on Hanneh Breineh, the tears streaming down her cheeks. "I can't stand it no more. I came into you for a minute to run away from my troubles. It's only when I sit myself down to peel potatoes or nurse the baby that I take time to draw a breath, and beg only for death."

Mrs. Pelz, accustomed to Hanneh Breineh's bitter outbursts, continued her scrubbing.

"*Ut!*" exclaimed Hanneh Breineh, irritated at her neighbor's silence, "what are you tearing up the world with your cleaning? What's the use to clean up when everything only gets dirty again?"

"I got to shine up my house for the holidays."

"You've got it so good nothing lays on your mind but to clean your house. Look on this little blood-sucker," said Hanneh Breineh, pointing to the wizened child, made prematurely solemn from starvation and neglect. "Could anybody keep that brat clean? I wash him one minute, and he's dirty the minute after." Little Sammy grew frightened and began to cry. "Shut up!" ordered the mother, picking up the child to nurse it again. "Can't you see me take a rest for a minute?"

The hungry child began to cry at the top of its weakened lungs.

"*Na, na*, you glutton." Hanneh Breineh took out a dirty pacifier from her pocket and stuffed it into the baby's mouth. The grave, pasty-faced infant shrank into a panic of fear, and chewed the nipple nervously, clinging to it with both his thin little hands.

"For what did I need yet the sixth one?" groaned Hanneh Breineh, turning to Mrs. Pelz. "Wasn't it enough five mouths to feed? If I didn't have this child on my neck, I could turn myself around and earn a few cents." She wrung her hands in a passion of despair. "*Gottuniu!* The earth should only take it before it grows up!"

"Pshaw! Pshaw!" reproved Mrs. Pelz. "Pity yourself on the child. Let it grow up already so long as it is here. See how frightened it looks on you." Mrs. Pelz took the child in her arms and petted it. "The poor little lamb! What did it done you should hate it so?"

Hanneh Breineh pushed Mrs. Pelz away from her.

"To whom can I open the wounds of my heart?" she moaned. "Nobody has pity on me. You don't believe me, nobody believes me until I'll fall down like a horse in the middle of the street. *Oi weh!* mine life is so black for my eyes. Some mothers got luck. A child gets run over by a car, some fall from a window, some burn themselves up with a match, some get choked with diphtheria; but no death takes mine away."

"God from the world! stop cursing!" admonished Mrs. Pelz. "What do you want from the poor children? Is it their fault that their father makes small wages? Why do you let it all out on them?" Mrs. Pelz sat down beside Hanneh Breineh. "Wait only till your children get old enough to go to the shop and earn money," she consoled. "Push only through those few years while they are yet small; your sun will begin to shine; you will live on the fat of the land, when they begin to bring you in the wages each week."

Hanneh Breineh refused to be comforted.

"Till they are old enough to go to the shop and earn money they'll eat the head off my bones," she wailed. "If you only knew the fights I got by each meal. Maybe I gave Abe a bigger piece of bread than Fanny. Maybe Fanny got a little more soup in her plate then Jake. Eating is dearer than diamonds. Potatoes went up a cent on a pound, and milk is only for millionaires. And once a week, when I buy a little meat for the Sabbath, the butcher weighs it for me like gold, with all the bones in it. When I come to lay the meat out on a plate and divide it up,

there ain't nothing to it but bones. Before, he used to throw me in a piece of fat extra or a piece of lung, but now you got to pay for everything, even for a bone to the soup."

"Never mind; you'll yet come out from all your troubles. Just as soon as your children get old enough to get their working papers the more children you got, the more money you'll have."

"Why should I fool myself with the false shine of hope? Don't I know it's already my black luck not to have it good in this world? Do you think American children will right away give everything they earn to their mother?"

"I know what is with you the matter," said Mrs. Pelz. "You didn't eat yet today. When it is empty in the stomach, the whole world looks black. Come, only let me give you something good to taste in the mouth; that will freshen you up." Mrs. Pelz went to the cupboard and brought out the saucepan of *gefüllte*<sup>3</sup> fish that she had cooked for dinner and placed it on the table in front of Hanneh Breineh. "Give a taste my fish," she said, taking one slice on a spoon, and handing it to Hanneh Breineh with a piece of bread. "I wouldn't give it to you on a plate because I just cleaned up my house, and I don't want to dirty up my dishes."

"What, am I a stranger you should have to serve me on a plate yet!" cried Hanneh Breineh, snatching the fish in her trembling fingers.

"*Oi weh!* How it melts through all the bones!" she exclaimed, brightening as she ate. "May it be for good luck to us all!" she exulted, waving aloft the last precious bite.

Mrs. Pelz was so flattered that she even ladled up a spoonful of gravy. "There is a bit of onion and carrot in it," she said, as she handed it to her neighbor.

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3. *gefüllte*, stuffed.

Hanneh Breineh sipped the gravy drop by drop, like a connoisseur sipping wine.

"Ah-h-h! A taste of that gravy lifts me up to heaven!" As she disposed leisurely of the slice of onion and carrot she relaxed and expanded and even grew jovial. "Let us wish all our troubles on the Russian Czar! Let him bust with our worries for rent! Let him get shriveled with our hunger for bread! Let his eyes dry out of his head looking for work!

"Pshaw! I'm forgetting from everything," she exclaimed, jumping up. "It must be eleven or soon twelve, and my children will be right away out of school and fall on me like a pack of wild wolves. I better quick run to the market and see what cheaper I can get for a quarter."

Because of the lateness of her coming, the stale bread at the nearest bakeshop was sold out, and Hanneh Breineh had to trudge from shop to shop in search of the usual bargain, and spent nearly an hour to save two cents.

In the meantime the children returned from school, and finding the door locked, climbed through the fire-escape, and entered the house through the window. Seeing nothing on the table, they rushed to the stove. Abe pulled a steaming potato out of the boiling pot, and so scalded his fingers that the potato fell to the floor; whereupon the three others pounced on it.

"It was my potato," cried Abe, blowing his burned fingers, while with the other hand and his foot he cuffed and kicked the three who were struggling on the floor. A wild fight ensued, and the potato was smashed under Abe's foot amid shouts and screams. Hanneh Breineh, on the stairs, heard the noise of her famished brood, and topped their cries with curses and invectives.

"They are here already, the savages! They are here already to shorten my life! They heard you all over the hall, in all the houses around!"

The children, disregarding her words, pounced on her market-basket, shouting ravenously: "Mama, I'm hungry! What more do you got to eat?"

They tore the bread and herring out of Hanneh Breineh's basket and devoured it in starved savagery, clamoring for more.

"Murderers!" screamed Hanneh Breineh, goaded beyond endurance. "What are you tearing from me my flesh? From where should I steal to give you more? Here I had already a pot of potatoes and a whole loaf of bread and two herrings, and you swallowed it down in the wink of an eye. I have to have Rockefeller's millions to fill your stomachs."

All at once Hanneh Breineh became aware that Benny was missing. "*Oi weh!*" she burst out, wringing her hands in a new wave of woe, "where is Benny? Didn't he come home yet from school?"

She ran out into the hall, opened the grime-coated window, and looked up and down the street; but Benny was nowhere in sight.

"Abe, Jake, Fanny, quick, find Benny!" entreated Hanneh Breineh as she rushed back into the kitchen. But the children, anxious to snatch a few minutes' play before the school-call, dodged past her and hurried out.

With the baby on her arm, Hanneh Breineh hastened to the kindergarten.

"Why are you keeping Benny here so long?" she shouted at the teacher as she flung open the door. "If you had my bitter heart, you would send him home long ago and not wait till I got to come for him."

The teacher turned calmly and consulted her record-cards.

"Benny Safron? He wasn't present this morning."

"Not here?" shrieked Hanneh Breineh. "I pushed him out myself he should go. The children didn't want to take

him, and I had no time. Woe is me! Where is my child?" She began pulling her hair and beating her breast as she ran into the street.

Mrs. Pelz was busy at a pushcart, picking over some spotted apples, when she heard the clamor of an approaching crowd. A block off she recognized Hanneh Breineh, her hair disheveled, her clothes awry, running toward her with her yelling baby in her arms, the crowd following.

"Friend mine," cried Hanneh Breineh, falling on Mrs. Pelz's neck, "I lost my Benny, the best child of all my children." Tears streamed down her red, swollen eyes as she sobbed. "Benny! mine heart, mine life! *Oi-i-i!*"

Mrs. Pelz took the frightened baby out of the mother's arms.

"Still yourself a little! See how you're frightening your child."

"Woe to me! Where is my Benny? Maybe he's killed already by a car. Maybe he fainted away from hunger. He didn't eat nothing all day long. *Gottuniu!* Pity yourself on me!"

She lifted her hands full of tragic entreaty.

"People, my child! Get me my child! I'll go crazy out of my head! Get me my child, or I'll take poison before your eyes!"

"Still yourself a little!" pleaded Mrs. Pelz.

"Talk not to me!" cried Hanneh Breineh, wringing her hands. "You're having all your children. I lost mine. Every good luck comes to other people. But I didn't live yet to see a good day in my life. Mine only joy, mine Benny, is lost away from me."

The crowd followed Hanneh Breineh as she wailed through the streets, leaning on Mrs. Pelz. By the time she returned to her house the children were back from school; but seeing that Benny was not there, she chased

them out in the street, crying: "Out of here, you robbers, gluttons! Go find Benny!"

Hanneh Breineh crumpled into a chair in utter prostration. "*Oi weh!* he's lost! Mine life; my little bird; mine only joy! How many nights I spent nursing him when he had the measles! And all that I suffered for weeks and months when he had the whooping cough! How the eyes went out of my head till I learned him how to walk, till I learned him how to talk! And such a smart child! If I lost all the others, it wouldn't tear me so by the heart."

She worked herself up into such a hysteria, crying, and tearing her hair, and hitting her head with her knuckles, that at last she fell into a faint. It took some time before Mrs. Pelz, with the aid of neighbors, revived her.

"Benny, mine angel!" she moaned as she opened her eyes.

Just then a policeman came in with the lost Benny.

"*Na, na*, here you got him already!" said Mrs. Pelz. "Why did you carry on so for nothing? Why did you tear up the world like a crazy?"

The child's face was streaked with tears as he cowered, frightened and forlorn. Hanneh Breineh sprang toward him, slapping his cheeks, boxing his ears, before the neighbors could rescue him from her.

"Woe on your head!" cried the mother. "Where did you lost yourself? Ain't I got enough worries on my head than to go around looking for you? I didn't have yet a minute's peace from that child since he was born."

"See a crazy mother!" remonstrated Mrs. Pelz, rescuing Benny from another beating. "Such a mouth! With one breath she blesses him when he is lost, and with the other breath she curses him when he is found."

Hanneh Breineh took from the window-sill a piece of herring covered with swarming flies, and putting it on a



slice of dry bread, she filled a cup of tea that had been stewing all day, and dragged Benny over to the table to eat. But the child, choking with tears, was unable to touch the food.

"Go eat!" commanded Hanneh Breineh. "Eat and choke yourself eating!"

"Maybe she won't remember me no more. Maybe the servant won't let me in," thought Mrs. Pelz as she walked by the brownstone house on Eighty-fourth Street where she had been told Hanneh Breineh now lived. At last she summoned up enough courage to climb the steps. She was all out of breath as she rang the bell with trembling fingers. "*Oi weh!* even the outside smells riches and plenty! Such curtains! And shades on all windows like by millionaires! Twenty years ago she used to eat from the pot to the hand, and now she lives in such a palace."

A whiff of steam-heated warmth swept over Mrs. Pelz as the door opened, and she saw her old friend of the tenements dressed in silk and diamonds like a being from another world.

"Mrs. Pelz, is it you!" cried Hanneh Breineh, overjoyed at the sight of her former neighbor. "Come right in. Since when are you back in New York?"

"We came last week," mumbled Mrs. Pelz as she was led into a richly carpeted reception-room.

"Make yourself comfortable. Take off your shawl," urged Hanneh Breineh.

But Mrs. Pelz only drew her shawl more tightly around her, a keen sense of her poverty gripping her as she gazed, abashed by the luxurious wealth that shone from every corner. "This shawl covers up my rags," she said, trying to hide her shabby sweater.

"I'll tell you what; come right into the kitchen," sug-

gested Hanneh Breineh. "The servant is away for this afternoon, and we can feel more comfortable there. I can breathe like a free person in my kitchen when the girl has her day out."

Mrs. Pelz glanced about her in an excited daze. Never in her life had she seen anything so wonderful as a white tiled kitchen, with its glistening porcelain sink and the aluminum pots and pans that shone like silver.

"Where are you staying now?" asked Hanneh Breineh as she pinned her apron over her silk dress.

"I moved back to Delancey Street, where we used to live," replied Mrs. Pelz as she seated herself cautiously in a white enameled chair.

"*Oi weh!* What grand times we had in that old house when we were neighbors!" sighed Hanneh Breineh, looking at her old friend with misty eyes.

"You still think on Delancey Street? Haven't you more high-class neighbors uptown here?"

"A good neighbor is not to be found every day," deplored Hanneh Breineh. "Uptown here, where each lives in his own house, nobody cares if the person next door is dying or going crazy from loneliness. It ain't anything like we used to have it in Delancey Street, when we could walk into one another's rooms without knocking, and borrow a pinch of salt or a pot to cook in."

Hanneh Breineh went over to the pantry-shelf.

"We are going to have a bite right here on the kitchen table like on Delancey Street. So long there's no servant to watch us we can eat what we please."

"*Oi!* How it waters my mouth with appetite, the smell of the herring and onion!" chuckled Mrs. Pelz, sniffing the welcome odors with greedy pleasure.

Hanneh Breineh pulled a dish-towel from the rack and threw one end of it to Mrs. Pelz.

"So long there's no servant around, we can use it together for a napkin. It's dirty, anyhow. How it freshens up my heart to see you!" she rejoiced as she poured out her tea into a saucer. "If you would only know how I used to beg my daughter to write for me a letter to you; but these American children, what is to them a mother's feelings?"

"What are you talking!" cried Mrs. Pelz. "The whole world rings with you and your children. Everybody is envying you. Tell me how began your luck?"

"You heard how my husband died with consumption," replied Hanneh Breineh. "The five hundred dollars lodge money gave me the first lift in life, and I opened a little grocery store. Then my son Abe married himself to a girl with a thousand dollars. That started him in business, and now he has the biggest shirt-waist factory on West Twenty-ninth Street."

"Yes, I heard your son had a factory." Mrs. Pelz hesitated and stammered: "I'll tell you the truth. What I came to ask you—I thought maybe you would beg your son Abe if he would give my husband a job."

"Why not?" said Hanneh Breineh. "He keeps more than five hundred hands. I'll ask him he should take in Mr. Pelz."

"Long years on you, Hanneh Breineh! You'll save my life if you could only help my husband get work."

"Of course my son will help him. All my children like to do good. My daughter Fanny is a milliner on Fifth Avenue, and she takes in the poorest girls in her shop and even pays them sometimes while they learn the trade." Hanneh Breineh's face lit up, and her chest filled with pride as she enumerated the successes of her children.

"And my son Benny he wrote a play on Broadway and he gave away more than a hundred free tickets for the first night."

"Benny? The one who used to get lost from home all the time? You always did love that child more than all the rest. And what is Sammy your baby doing?"

"He ain't a baby no longer. He goes to college and quarterback's the football team. They can't get along without him.

"And my son Jake, I nearly forgot him. He began collecting rent in Delancey Street, and now he is boss of renting the swellest apartment houses on Riverside Drive."

"What did I tell you? In America children are like money in the bank," purred Mrs. Pelz as she pinched and patted Hanneh Breineh's sleeve. "*Oi weh!* How it shines from you! You ought to kiss the air and dance for joy and happiness. It is such a bitter frost outside; a pail of coal is so dear, and you got it so warm with steam heat. I had to pawn my feather bed to have enough for the rent, and you are rolling in money."

"Yes, I got it good in some ways, but money ain't everything," sighed Hanneh Breineh.

"You ain't yet satisfied?"

"But here I got no friends," complained Hanneh Breineh.

"Friends?" queried Mrs. Pelz. "What greater friend is there on earth than the dollar?"

"*Oi!* Mrs. Pelz; if you could only look into my heart! I'm so choked up! You know they say a cow has a long tongue, but can't talk." Hanneh Breineh shook her head wistfully, and her eyes filmed with inward brooding. "My children give me everything from the best. When I was sick, they got me a nurse by day and one by night. They bought me the best wine. If I asked for dove's milk, they would buy it for me; but—but—I can't talk myself out in their language. They want to make me over for an American lady, and I'm different." Tears cut their way under

her eyelids with a pricking pain as she went on: "When I was poor, I was free, and could holler and do what I like in my own house. Here I got to lie still like a mouse under a broom. Between living up to my Fifth Avenue daughter and keeping up with the servants, I am like a sinner in the next world that is thrown from one hell to another."

The door-bell rang, and Hanneh Breineh jumped up with a start.

"*Oi weh!* It must be the servant back already!" she exclaimed as she tore off her apron. "*Oi weh!* Let's quickly put the dishes together in a dish-pan. If she sees I eat on the kitchen table, she will look on me like the dirt under her feet."

Mrs. Pelz seized her shawl in haste. "I better run home quick in my rags before your servant sees me."

"I'll speak to Abe about the job," said Hanneh Breineh as she pushed a bill into the hand of Mrs. Pelz, who edged out as the servant entered.

"I'm having fried potato *lotkes*<sup>4</sup> special for you, Benny," said Hanneh Breineh as the children gathered about the table for the family dinner given in honor of Benny's success with his new play. "Do you remember how you used to lick the fingers from them?"

"Oh, Mother!" reproved Fanny. "Anyone hearing you would think we were still in the pushcart district."

"Stop your nagging, Sis, and let Ma alone," commanded Benny, patting his mother's arm affectionately. "I'm home only once a month. Let her feed me what she pleases. My stomach is bomb-proof."

"Do I hear that the President is coming to your play?" said Abe as he stuffed a napkin over his diamond-studded shirt-front.

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4. *lotkes*, cakes.

"Why shouldn't he come?" returned Benny. "The critics say it's the greatest antidote for the race hatred created by the war. If you want to know, he is coming tonight; and what's more, our box is next to the President's."

"Nu, Mammeh," sallied Jake, "did you ever dream in Delancey Street that we should rub sleeves with the President?"

"I always said that Benny had more head than the rest of you," replied the mother.

As the laughter died away, Jake went on:

"Honor you are getting plenty; but how much *mezummen*<sup>5</sup> does this play bring you? Can I invest any of it in real estate for you?"

"I'm getting ten per cent royalties of the gross receipts," replied the youthful playwright.

"How much is that?" queried Hanneh Breineh.

"Enough to buy up all your fish markets in Delancey Street," laughed Abe in good-natured raillery at his mother.

Her son's jest cut like a knife-thrust in her heart. She felt her heart ache with the pain that she was shut out from their successes. Each added triumph only widened the gulf. And when she tried to bridge this gulf by asking questions, they only thrust her back upon herself.

"Your fame has even helped me get my hat trade solid with the Four Hundred," put in Fanny. "You bet I let Mrs. Van Suyden know that our box is next to the President's. She said she would drop in to meet you. Of course she let on to me that she hadn't seen the play yet, though my designer said she saw her there on the opening night."

"Oh, gosh! the toadies!" sneered Benny. "Nothing so sickens you with success as the way people who once shoved you off the sidewalk come crawling to you on their stomachs begging you to dine with them."

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5. *mezummen*, money.

"Say, that leading man of yours he's some class," cried Fanny. "That's the man I'm looking for. Will you invite him to supper after the theater?"

The playwright turned to his mother.

"Say, Ma," he said laughingly, "how would you like a real actor for a son-in-law?"

"She should worry," mocked Sam. "She'll be discussing with him the future of the Greek drama. Too bad it doesn't happen to be Warfield,<sup>6</sup> or mother could give him tips on the 'Auctioneer.'"

Jake turned to his mother with a covert grin.

"I guess you'd have no objection if Fanny got next to Benny's leading man. He makes at least fifteen hundred a week. That wouldn't be such a bad addition to the family, would it?"

Again the bantering tone stabbed Hanneh Breineh. Everything in her began to tremble and break loose.

"Why do you ask me?" she cried, throwing her napkin into her plate. "Do I count for a person in this house? If I'll say something, will you even listen to me? What is to me the grandest man that my daughter could pick out? Another enemy in my house! Another person to shame himself from me!" She swept in her children in one glance of despairing anguish as she rose from the table. "What worth is an old mother to American children? The President is coming tonight to the theater, and none of you asked me to go." Unable to check the rising tears, she fled toward the kitchen and banged the door.

They all looked at one another guiltily.

"Say, Sis," Benny called out sharply, "what sort of frame-up is this? Haven't you told mother that she was to go with us tonight?"

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6. Warfield, David (1866- ), one of the most popular American actors, who played the leading rôle, that of a Jewish auctioneer, in *The Auctioneer*.



"Yes—I——" Fanny bit her lips as she fumbled evasively for words. "I asked her if she wouldn't mind my taking her some other time."

"Now you have made a mess of it!" fumed Benny. "Mother'll be too hurt to go now."

"Well, I don't care," snapped Fanny. "I can't appear with mother in a box at the theater. Can I introduce her to Mrs. Van Suyden? And suppose your leading man should ask to meet me?"

"Take your time, Sis. He hasn't asked yet," scoffed Benny.

"The more reason I shouldn't spoil my chances. You know mother. She'll spill the beans that we come from Delancey Street the minute we introduce her anywhere. Must I always have the black shadow of my past trailing after me?"

"But have you no feelings for mother?" admonished Abe.

"I've tried harder than all of you to do my duty. I've *lived* with her." She turned angrily upon them. "I've borne the shame of mother while you bought her off with a present and a treat here and there. God knows how hard I tried to civilize her so as not to have to blush with shame when I take her anywhere. I dressed her in the most stylish Paris models, but Delancey Street sticks out from every inch of her. Whenever she opens her mouth, I'm done for. You fellows had your chance to rise in the world because a man is free to go up as high as he can reach up to; but I, with all my style and pep, can't get a man my equal because a girl is always judged by her mother."

They were silenced by her vehemence, and unconsciously turned to Benny.

"I guess we all tried to do our best by mother," said Benny, thoughtfully. "But wherever there is growth, there is pain and heartbreak. The trouble with us is that

the Ghetto<sup>7</sup> of the Middle Ages and the children of the twentieth century have to live under one roof, and——"

A sound of crashing dishes came from the kitchen, and the voice of Hanneh Breineh resounded through the dining-room as she wreaked her pent-up fury on the helpless servant.

"Oh, my nerves! I can't stand it any more! There will be no girl again for another week," cried Fanny.

"Oh, let up on the old lady," protested Abe. "Since she can't take it out on any of us any more, what harm is it if she cusses the servants?"

"If you fellows had to chase around employment agencies, you wouldn't see anything funny about it. Why can't we move into a hotel that will do away with the need of servants altogether?"

"I got it better," said Jake, consulting a notebook from his pocket. "I have on my list an apartment on Riverside Drive where there's only a small kitchenette; but we can do away with the cooking, for there is a dining service in the building."

The new Riverside apartment to which Hanneh Breineh was removed by her socially ambitious children was for the habitually active mother an empty desert of enforced idleness. Deprived of her kitchen, Hanneh Breineh felt robbed of the last reason for her existence. Cooking and marketing and puttering busily with pots and pans gave her an excuse for living and struggling and bearing up with her children. The lonely idleness of Riverside Drive stunned all her senses and arrested all her thoughts. It gave her that choked sense of being cut off from air, from

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7. *Ghetto*, the part of a city formerly set apart by law for its Jewish inhabitants. Here it is used to indicate the contrast in the ideals and ideas of such a community and present-day ideas and ideals.

life, from everything warm and human. The cold indifference, the each-for-himself look in the eyes of the people about her were like stinging slaps in the face. Even the children had nothing real or human in them. They were starched and stiff miniatures of their elders.

But the most unendurable part of the stifling life on Riverside Drive was being forced to eat in the public dining-room. No matter how hard she tried to learn polite table manners, she always found people staring at her, and her daughter rebuking her for eating with the wrong fork or guzzling the soup or staining the cloth.

In a fit of rebellion Hanneh Breineh resolved never to go down to the public dining-room again, but to make use of the gas stove in the kitchenette to cook her own meals. That very day she rode down to Delancey Street and purchased a new market basket. For some time she walked among the haggling pushcart venders, relaxing and swimming in the warm waves of her old familiar past.

A fish-peddler held up a large carp in his black, hairy hand and waved it dramatically:

"Women! Women! Fourteen cents a pound!"

He ceased his raucous shouting as he saw Hanneh Breineh in her rich attire approach his cart.

"How much?" she asked pointing to the fattest carp.

"Fifteen cents, lady," said the peddler, smirking as he raised his price.

"Swindler! Didn't I hear you call fourteen cents?" shrieked Hanneh Breineh, exultingly, the spirit of the penny surging in her blood. Diplomatically, Hanneh Breineh turned as if to go, and the fishman seized her basket in frantic fear.

"I should live; I'm losing money on the fish, lady," whined the peddler. "I'll let it down to thirteen cents for you only."

"Two pounds for a quarter, and not a penny more," said Hanneh Breineh, thrilling again with the rare sport of bargaining, which had been her chief joy in the good old days of poverty.

"Nu, I want to make the first sale for good luck." The peddler threw the fish on the scale.

As he wrapped up the fish, Hanneh Breineh saw the driven look of worry in his haggard eyes, and when he counted out for her the change from her dollar, she waved it aside.

"Keep it for your luck," she said, and hurried off to strike a new bargain at a pushcart of onions.

Hanneh Breineh returned triumphantly with her purchases. The basket under her arm gave forth the old, homelike odors of herring and garlic, while the scaly tail of a four-pound carp protruded from its newspaper wrapping. A gilded placard on the door of the apartment house proclaimed that all merchandise must be delivered through the trade entrance in the rear; but Hanneh Breineh with her basket strode proudly through the marble-paneled hall and rang nonchalantly for the elevator.

The uniformed hall-man, erect, expressionless, frigid with dignity, stepped forward:

"Just a minute, madam. I'll call a boy to take up your basket for you."

Hanneh Breineh, glaring at him, jerked the basket savagely from his hands.

"Mind your own business," she retorted. "I'll take it up myself. Do you think you're a Russian policeman to boss me in my own house?"

Angry lines appeared on the countenance of the representative of social decorum.

"It is against the rules, madam," he said stiffly.

"You should sink into the earth with all your rules and brass buttons. Ain't this America? Ain't this a free country? Can't I take up in my own house what I buy with my own money?" cried Hanneh Breineh, reveling in the opportunity to shower forth the volley of invectives that had been suppressed in her for the weeks of deadly dignity of Riverside Drive.

In the midst of this uproar Fanny came in with Mrs. Van Suyden. Hanneh Breineh rushed over to her, crying: "This bossy policeman won't let me take up my basket in the elevator."

The daughter, unnerved with shame and confusion, took the basket in her white-gloved hand and ordered the hall-boy to take it around to the regular delivery entrance.

Hanneh Breineh was so hurt by her daughter's apparent defense of the hall-man's rules that she utterly ignored Mrs. Van Suyden's greeting and walked up the seven flights of stairs out of sheer spite.

"You see the tragedy of my life?" broke out Fanny, turning to Mrs. Van Suyden.

"You poor child! You go right up to your dear old lady mother, and I'll come some other time."

Instantly Fanny regretted her words. Mrs. Van Suyden's pity only roused her wrath the more against her mother.

Breathless from climbing the stairs, Hanneh Breineh entered the apartment just as Fanny tore the faultless millinery creation from her head and threw it on the floor in a rage.

"Mother, you are the ruination of my life! You have driven away Mrs. Van Suyden, as you have driven away all my best friends. What do you think we got this apartment for but to get rid of your fish smells and your brawls

with the servants? And here you come with a basket on your arm as if you just landed from the steerage! And this afternoon, of all times, when Benny is bringing his leading man to tea! When will you ever stop disgracing us?"

"When I'm dead," said Hanneh Breineh, grimly. "When the earth will cover me up, then you'll be free to go your American way. I'm not going to make myself over for a lady on Riverside Drive. I hate you and all your swell friends. I'll not let myself be choked up here by you or by the hall-boss-policeman that is higher in your eyes than your own mother."

"So that's your thanks for all we've done for you?" cried the daughter.

"All you've done for me?" shouted Hanneh Breineh. "What have you done for me? You hold me like a dog on a chain. It stands in the Talmud:<sup>8</sup> some children give their mothers dry bread and water and go to heaven for it, and some give their mother roast duck and go to Gehenna<sup>9</sup> because it's not given with love."

"You want me to love you yet?" raged the daughter. "You knocked every bit of love out of me when I was yet a kid. All the memories of childhood I have is your everlasting cursing and yelling that we were gluttons."

The bell rang sharply, and Hanneh Breineh flung open the door.

"Your groceries, ma'am," said the boy.

Hanneh Breineh seized the basket from him, and with a vicious fling sent it rolling across the room, strewing its contents over the Persian rugs and inlaid floor. Then seizing her hat and coat, she stormed out of the apartment and down the stairs.

8. *Talmud*, the body of Jewish civil and religious law.

9. *Gehenna*, the place of future torment, originally the valley of Hinnom, near Jerusalem, where the city's refuse was thrown, fires being kept burning to purify the air.

Mr. and Mrs. Pelz sat crouched and shivering over their meager supper when the door opened, and Hanneh Breineh in fur coat and plumed hat charged into the room.

"I come to cry out to you my bitter heart," she sobbed. "Woe is me! It is so black for my eyes!"

"What is the matter with you, Hanneh Breineh?" cried Mrs. Pelz in bewildered alarm.

"I am turned out of my own house by the brass-buttoned policeman that bosses the elevator. *Oi-i-i-i! Weh-h-h-h!* What have I from my life? The whole world rings with my son's play. Even the President came to see it, and I, his mother, have not seen it yet. My heart is dying in me like in a prison," she went on wailing.

"I am starved out for a piece of real eating. In that swell restaurant is nothing but napkins and forks and lettuce-leaves. There are a dozen plates to every bite of food. And it looks so fancy on the plate, but it's nothing but straw in the mouth. I'm starving, but I can't swallow down their American eating."

"Hanneh Breineh," said Mrs. Pelz, "you are sinning before God. Look on your fur coat; it alone would feed a whole family for a year. I never had yet a piece of fur trimming on a coat, and you are in fur from the neck to the feet. I never had yet a piece of feather on a hat, and your hat is all feathers."

"What are you envying me?" protested Hanneh Breineh. "What have I from all my fine furs and feathers when my children are strangers to me? All the fur coats in the world can't warm up the loneliness inside my heart. All the grandest feathers can't hide the bitter shame in my face that my children shame themselves from me."

Hanneh Breineh suddenly loomed over them like some ancient, heroic figure of the Bible condemning unrighteousness. "Why should my children shame themselves from



me? From where did they get the stuff to work themselves up in the world? Did they get it from the air? How did they get all their smartness to rise over the people around them? Why don't the children of born American mothers write my Benny's plays? It is I, who never had a chance to be a person, who gave him the fire in his head. If I would have had a chance to go to school and learn the language, what couldn't I have been? It is I and my mother and my mother's mother and my father and my father's father who had such a black life in Poland; it is our choked thoughts and feelings that are flaming up in my children and making them great in America. And yet they shame themselves from me!"

For a moment Mr. and Mrs. Pelz were hypnotized by the sweep of her words. Then Hanneh Breineh sank into a chair in utter exhaustion. She began to weep bitterly, her body shaking with sobs.

"Woe is me! For what did I suffer and hope on my children? A bitter old age—my end. I'm so lonely!"

All the dramatic fire seemed to have left her. The spell was broken. They saw the Hanneh Breineh of old, ever discontented, ever complaining, even in the midst of riches and plenty.

"Hanneh Breineh," said Mrs. Pelz, "the only trouble with you is that you got it too good. People will tear the eyes out of your head because you're complaining yet. If I only had your fur coat! If I only had your diamonds! I have nothing. You have everything. You are living on the fat of the land. You go right back home and thank God that you don't have my bitter lot."

"You got to let me stay here with you," insisted Hanneh Breineh. "I'll not go back to my children except when they bury me. When they will see my dead face, they will understand how they killed me."

Mrs. Pelz glanced nervously at her husband. They barely had enough covering for their one bed; how could they possibly lodge a visitor?

"I don't want to take up your bed," said Hanneh Breineh. "I don't care if I have to sleep on the floor or on the chairs, but I'll stay here for the night."

Seeing that she was bent on staying, Mr. Pelz prepared to sleep by putting a few chairs next to the trunk, and Hanneh Breineh was invited to share the rickety bed with Mrs. Pelz.

The mattress was full of lumps and hollows. Hanneh Breineh lay cramped and miserable, unable to stretch out her limbs. For years she had been accustomed to hair mattresses and ample woolen blankets, so that though she covered herself with her fur coat, she was too cold to sleep. But worse than the cold were the creeping things on the wall. And as the lights were turned low, the mice came through the broken plaster and raced across the floor. The foul odors of the kitchen-sink added to the night horrors.

"Are you going back home?" asked Mrs. Pelz as Hanneh Breineh put her hat and coat on the next morning.

"I don't know where I'm going," she replied as she put a bill into Mrs. Pelz's hand.

For hours Hanneh Breineh walked through the crowded Ghetto<sup>10</sup> streets. She realized that she no longer could endure the sordid ugliness of her past, and yet she could not go home to her children. She only felt that she must go on and on.

In the afternoon a cold, drizzling rain set in. She was worn out from the sleepless night and hours of tramping. With a piercing pain in her heart she at last turned back and boarded the subway for Riverside Drive. She had fled

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10. *Ghetto*, the Jewish quarter on the East Side in New York City. Notice the difference between the use of the word here and on page 153.

from the marble sepulcher of the Riverside apartment to her old home in the Ghetto; but now she knew that she could not live there again. She had outgrown her past by the habits of years of physical comforts, and these material comforts that she could no longer do without choked and crushed the life within her.

A cold shudder went through Hanneh Breineh as she approached the apartment house. Peering through the plate glass of the door she saw the face of the uniformed hall-man. For a hesitating moment she remained standing in the drizzling rain, unable to enter and yet knowing full well that she would have to enter.

Then suddenly Hanneh Breineh began to laugh. She realized that it was the first time she had laughed since her children had become rich. But it was the hard laugh of bitter sorrow. Tears streamed down her furrowed cheeks and she walked slowly up the granite steps.

"The fat of the land!" muttered Hanneh Breineh, with a choking sob as the hall-man with immobile face deferentially swung open the door—"the fat of the land!"

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS

"The Fat of the Land" was first published in *The Century Magazine*, August, 1919.

1. The story portrays very vividly the pathos and the humor in the process of making Americans out of recently arrived immigrant families. For the second generation the situation is simpler. Sammy and Abe and Benny, in this story, grow up as many other Americans are reared; but it is impossible to transfer their mother from the poverty and suppression she had known in Poland to new ways of life and to prosperity in America. At the end of the story, Hanneh Breineh finds herself satisfied with neither the slum life she had known nor the scale of living to which

her children in the New World have climbed. She is the sacrifice offered for the rise of her children. The story suggests an interesting chapter in the history of our national life.

2. State the conflict represented in the story (see the Introduction, page xvii). In what sentence is the theme of the story expressed?

3. Do you feel that Hanneh Breineh is a real person? How does she conform to what is said in the Introduction about the unusualness of the dominant character in the short story? Does she do anything that keeps you from sympathizing with her? For what purpose is the character of Mrs. Pelz created?

4. Study the dialogue carefully. What proportion of the story is in dialogue and what in plain narrative? What would be gained or lost if you should put the whole story into straight narrative? Is Hanneh made to talk a great deal in order to pad the story or to aid in characterizing her?

5. How many distinct incidents does the story contain? What is the greatest length of time between any two of the incidents? Do the large number of scenes and the long break in time at one part of the story interfere with the singleness of effect of the whole narrative?

*Suggested Reading.*—Stories of recent arrivals in America: *Long Ever Ago* by Rupert Hughes; *Gaslight Sonatas* and *Humoresque* by Fannie Hurst; *The Heritage and Other Stories* by Viola Shore; *The Daughter of the Bernsteins* by Bruno Lessing.

*Biographical Note.*—Anzia Yeziarska was born in Poland in 1885. She came to the United States in 1901 and later worked in factories, sweatshops, and as a cook in private families. She has written a novel of New York life, *Salome of the Tenements* (1923). She now lives in New York City.

## ACCORDING TO THE CODE\*

IRVIN S. COBB

The most important thing about Quintus Q. Montjoy, Esquire, occurred a good many years before he was born. It was his grandfather.

In the natural course of things practically all of us have, or have had, grandfathers. The science of eugenics, which is comparatively new, and the rule of species, which is somewhat older, both teach us that without grandfathers there can be no grandchildren. But only one in a million is blessed even unto the third generation by having had such a grandfather as Quintus Q. Montjoy had. That, indeed, was a fragrant inheritance, and by day and by night the legatee inhaled its perfumes. I refer to his grandfather on his father's side, the late Braxton Montjoy.

The grandfather on the maternal side must have been a person of abundant consequence, too, else he would never have begat him a daughter worthy to be mated with the progeny of that other illustrious man; but of him you heard little or nothing. Being long deceased, his memory was eclipsed in the umbra<sup>1</sup> of a more compelling personality. It would seem that in all things, in all that he did and said in this line, Braxton Montjoy was exactly what the proud grandsire of a justly proud grandscion should be. He was a gentleman of the Old School (in case that conveys anything to your understanding) and a first family of Virginia. He

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\*From *Old Judge Priest* by Irvin S. Cobb, by permission of the George H. Doran Company, publishers, copyright 1916.

1. *umbra*, Latin for *shadow* or *shade*.

was a captain of volunteers in the War of Eighteen-Twelve. He was a colonel in the Mexican War; that, though, was after he emigrated out over the Wilderness Trail<sup>2</sup> to the newer and cruder commonwealth of Kentucky. He was one of the founders of our town and its first mayor in that far-distant time when it emerged from the muddled cocoon of a wood-landing on the river bank and became a corporation with a charter and a board of trustees and all. Later, along in the early fifties, he served our district in the upper branch of the State Legislature. In the Civil War he would undoubtedly have been a general—his descendant gainsaying as much—except for the unfortunate circumstance of his having passed away at an advanced age some years prior to the beginning of that direful conflict. Wherefore the descendant in question, being determined that his grandfather should not be cheated of his due military meed by death, conferred an honorary brevet upon him, anyway.

Nor was that all that might be said of this most magnificent of ancestors—by no means was it all. Ever and always was he a person of lofty ideals and mountainous principles. He never drank his dram in a groggery nor discussed the affairs of the day upon the public highway. Spurning such new-fangled and effetely-luxurious modes of transportation as carriages, he went horseback whenever he went, and wheresoever. In the summer time when the family made the annual pilgrimage back across the mountains to Old White Sulphur<sup>3</sup> he rode the entire distance, both going and coming, upon a white stallion named Fairfax. To the day of his death he chewed his provender with his own teeth and looked upon the world-at-large through eyes unlensed.

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2. *Wilderness Trail*, the route to the West established by the pioneer settlers.

3. *Old White Sulphur*, a famous watering-place in Virginia.

Yet he might have owned a hundred sets of teeth or five hundred pairs of spectacles, had he been so minded, for to him appertained eighty slaves and four thousand acres of the fattest farm lands to be found in the rich bottoms of our country. War and Lincoln's Proclamation freed the slaves, but the lands remained, intact and unmortgaged, to make easier the pathways of those favored beings of his blood who might come after him. Finally, he was a duelist of a great and fearsome repute; an authority recognized and quoted, in the ceremonials of the code. In four historic meetings upon the field of honor he figured as a principal; and in at least three more as a second. Under his right shoulder blade, a cousin of President Thomas Jefferson carried to his grave a lump of lead which had been deposited there by this great man one fair fine morning in the Valley of Virginia, during the adjudication, with pistols, of a dispute which grew out of a difference of opinion touching upon the proper way of curing a Smithfield<sup>1</sup> ham.

We did not know of these things at first hand. Only a few elderly inhabitants remembered Braxton Montjoy as he had appeared in the flesh. To the rest of our people he was a tradition, yet a living one, and this largely through virtue of the conversational activities of Quintus Q. Montjoy, the grandson aforesaid, aided and abetted by Mrs. Marcella Quistenbury. I should be depriving an estimable lady of a share of the credit due her did I omit some passing mention of Mrs. Quistenbury from this narrative. She was one who specialized in genealogy. There is one such as she in every Southern town and in most New England ones. Give her but a single name, a lone and solitary distant kinsman to start off with, and for you she would create, out of the rich stores of her mind, an entire family tree,

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1. *Smithfield*, a small town in Isle of Wight County, Virginia, famous for its production of smoke-cured hams.



complete from its roots, deeply implanted in the soil of native aristocracy, to the uttermost tip of its far-reaching and ramifying branches. In the delicate matter of superior breeding she liberally accorded the Montjoy connection first place among the old families of our end of the state. So, too, with equal freedom, did the last of the Montjoys, which made it practically unanimous and left the honor of the lineage in competent hands.

For Quintus Q.—alas and alackaday—was the last of his glorious line. Having neither sisters nor brothers and being unmarried, he abode alone beneath the ancestral roof tree. It was not exactly the ancestral roof tree, if you wish me to come right down to facts. The original homestead burned down long years before, but the present structure stood upon its site and was in all essential regards a faithful copy of its predecessor.

It might be said of our fellow-townsmen—and it was—that he lived and breathed and had his being in the shadow of his grandfather. Among the ribald and the irreverent stories circulated was one to the effect that he talked of him in his sleep. He talked of him pretty assiduously when awake; there wasn't any doubt of that. As you entered his home you were confronted in the main hall by a large oil portrait of an elderly gentleman of austere mien, wearing a swallow-fork coat and a neck muffler and with his hair brushed straight back from the forehead in a sweep, just as Andrew Jackson brushed his back. You were bound to notice this picture, the very first thing. If by any chance you didn't notice it, Quintus Q. found a way of directing your attention to it. Then you observed the family resemblance; Quintus Q., standing there alongside, held his hand on his hip after exactly the same fashion that his grandfather held his hand on his hip in the pictured pose. It was startling, really—the reproduction of

this trait by hereditary impulse. Quintus Q. thought there was something about the expression of the eyes, too.

If during the evening someone mentioned horses—and what assemblage of male Kentuckians ever bided together for any length of time without someone mentioning horses?—the host's memory was instantly quickened in regard to the white stallion named Fairfax. Fairfax achieved immortality beyond other horses of his period through Quintus Q. Some went so far as to intimate that Mr. Montjoy made a habit of serving hams upon his table for a certain and especial purpose. You had but to refer in complimentary terms to the flavor of the curly, shavings-thin slice which he had deposited upon your plate.

"Speaking of hams," he would say—"speaking of hams, I am reminded of my grandfather, the old General—General Braxton Montjoy, you remember. The General fought one of his duels—he fought four, you know, and acted as second in three others—over a ham. Or perhaps I should say over the process of smoking a ham with hickory wood. His antagonist was no less a person than a cousin of President Thomas Jefferson. The General thought his veracity had been impugned and he called the other gentleman out and shot him through the shoulder. Afterwards, I believe, they became great friends. Ah, sir, those were the good old days when a Southern gentleman had a proper jealousy of his honor. If one gentleman doubted another gentleman's word there was no exchange of vulgar billingsgate,<sup>5</sup> no unseemly brawling upon the street. The Code offered a remedy. One gentleman called the other gentleman out. Sometimes I wish that I might have lived in those good old days." Sometimes others wished that he might have, too, but I state that fact in parenthesis.

Then he would excuse himself and leave the table and

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5. *billingsgate*, abusive or profane language.

enter the library for a moment, returning with a polished rosewood case borne reverently in his two hands; and he would put the case down and dust it with a handkerchief and unlock it with a brass key which he carried upon his watch chain and, from their bed of faded velveteen within, bring forth two old dueling pistols with long barrels, and carved scrolls on their butts and hammers that stood up high like the ears of a startled colt. And he would bid you to decipher for yourself the name of his grandfather inscribed upon the brass trigger guards. You were given to understand that in a day of big men, Braxton Montjoy towered as a giant amongst them.

Aside from following the profession of being a grandson, Quintus Q. had no regular business. There was a sign reading "Real Estate and Loans" upon the glass door of his one-room suite in the Planters' Bank Building, but he didn't keep regular hours there. With the help of an agent, he looked after the collecting of the rents for his town property and the letting upon shares of leaseholds of his river-bottom farms; but otherwise you might say his chief occupation was that of being a sincere and conscientious descendant of a creditable forebear.

So much for the grandfather. So much, at this moment, for the grandson. Now we are going to get through the rind into the meat of our tale:

As may be recalled, State Senator Horace K. Maydew, of our town and county, being a leader of men and of issues, once upon a time hankered mightily to serve the district in Congress, and in the moment that he could almost taste of triumph accomplished had the cup dashed from his lips through the instrumentality of one who, locally, was fancied as being rather better than a dabster at politics, himself. During the months which succeeded this defeat, the mortified Maydew nursed a sharpened grudge toward

the enemy, keeping it barbed and fletched<sup>6</sup> against the time when he might let fly with it. Presently an opportunity for reprisals befell. Maydew's term as state senator neared its close. For personal reasons, which he found good and sufficient, the incumbent did not offer as a candidate to succeed himself. But quite naturally, and perhaps quite properly, he desired to name his successor. Privily he began casting about him for a likely and a suitable candidate, which to the senator's understanding meant one who would be biddable, tractable, and docile. Before he had quite agreed with himself upon a choice, young Tobias Houser came out into the open as an aspirant for the Democratic nomination, and when he heard the news Senator Maydew rehoned his hate to a razor-edge. For young Tobe Houser, who had been a farmer-boy and then a county-school teacher and who now had moved to town and gone into business, was something else besides—he was the nephew of Judge Priest, the only son of the judge's dead sister. It was the judge's money that had helped the young man through the state university. Undoubtedly—so Maydew read the signs of the times—it was the judge's influence which now brought the youngster forth as an aspirant for public office. In the Houser candidacy Maydew saw, or thought he saw, another attack upon his fiefship on<sup>7</sup> the party organization and the party machine.

On an evening of the same week in which Tobe Houser inserted his modestly-worded announcement card in the *Daily Evening News*, Senator Maydew called to conference—or to concurrence—two lieutenants who likewise had cause to be stalwart supporters of his policies. The meeting took place in the living-room of the Maydew home. When the drinks had been sampled and the cigars had been

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6. *fletched*, feathered, as an arrow.

7. *fiefship on*, loosely used for control over.

lighted, Senator Maydew came straight to the business in hand: "Well, gentlemen," he said, "I've got a candidate—a man none of us ever thought of before. How does the name of Quintus Q. Montjoy seem to strike you?"

Mr. Barnhill looked at Mr. Bonnin, and Mr. Bonnin looked back at Mr. Barnhill. Then both of them looked at Maydew.

"Montjoy, eh?" said Barnhill, doubtfully, seeming not to have heard aright.

"Quintus Q. Montjoy you said, didn't you?" asked Bonnin as though there had been any number of Montjoys to choose from. He spoke without enthusiasm.

"Certainly," answered Maydew briskly; "Quintus Q. Montjoy, Esquire. Any objections to him that you can think of, offhand?"

"Well," said Mr. Barnhill, who was large of person and slow of speech, "he ain't never done anything."

"If I'm any judge he never will do anything—much," supplemented Mr. Bonnin, who was by way of being small and nervous.

"You've said it—both of you," stated their leader, catching them up with a snap. "He never has done anything. That gives him a clean record to run on. He never will do anything—on his own hook, I mean. That'll make him a safe, sound, reliable man to have representing this district up yonder at Frankfort. Last session they licked the Stickney warehouse bill for us. This season it'll come up again for passage. I guarantee here and now that Quint Montjoy will vote right on that proposition and all other propositions that'll come up. He'll vote right because we'll tell him how to vote. I know him from the skin out."

"He's so powerfully pompous and bumptious—so kind of cocksure and high-an'-mighty," said Mr. Barnhill. "D'ye reckon, Hod, as how he'll stand without hitchin'?"

"I'll guarantee that, too," said Senator Maydew, with his left eyelid flickering down over his left eye in the ghost of a wink. "He don't know yet that he's going to be our candidate. Nobody knows it yet but you and me. But when he finds out from us that he's going to have a chance to rattle round in the same seat that his revered granddaddy once ornamented—well, just you watch him arise and shine. There's another little thing that you've overlooked. He's got money—plenty of it; as much money as any man in this town has got. He's not exactly what I'd call a profligate or a spendthrift. You may have noticed that except when he was spending it on himself he's very easy to control in money matters. But when we touch a match to his ambition and it flares up, he'll dig down deep and produce freely—or I miss my guess. For once we'll have a campaign fund with some real money behind it."

His tone changed and began to drip rancor:

"By Judas, I'll put up some of my own money! This is one time when I'm not counting the cost. I'm going to beat that young lummox of a Houser, if it's the last thing I do. I'm going to rub his nose in the mud. You two know without my telling you why I'd rather see Houser licked than any other man on earth—except one. And you know who that one is. We can't get at Priest yet—that chance will come later. But we can get his precious nephew, and I'm the man that's going to get him. And Quint Montjoy is the man I'm going to get him with."

"Well, Hod, jest ez you say," assented Mr. Barnhill dutifully. "I was only jest askin', that's all. You sort of tuck me off my feet at fust, but the way you put it now, it makes ever'thing look mighty promisin'. How about you, Wilbur?" and he turned to Mr. Bonnin.

"Oh, I'm agreeable," chimed Mr. Bonnin. "Only don't make any mistake about one thing—Houser's got a plenty



friends. He'll give us a fight all right. It won't be any walk-over."

"I want it to be a fight, and I don't want it to be a walk-over, either," said Senator Maydew. "The licking we give him will be all the sweeter, then."

He got up and started for the telephone on the wall.

"I'll just call up and see if our man is at home. If he is, we'll all three step over there right now and break the news to him, that the voice of the people has been lifted in an irresistible and clamorous demand for him to become their public servant at his own expense."

The Senator was in a good humor again.

"And say, Hod, whilst I'm thinkin' of it," put in Mr. Barnhill sapiently, "ef he should be at home and ef we should go over there, tell him for Goddle Midey's sake not to drag in that late lamentable grandpaw of his'n, more'n a million times durin' the course of the campaign. It's all right mebbe to appeal to the old famblies. I ain't bearin' ary grudge ag'inst old famblies, 'though I ain't never found the time to belong to one of 'em myself. But there's a right smart chance of middle-aged famblies and even a few toler'ble new famblies in this here community. And them's the kind that does the large bulk of the votin' in primary elections."

We've had campaigns and campaigns and then more and yet other campaigns in our county. We had them every year—and we still do. Being what they were and true to their breeding, the early settlers started running for office almost before the Indians had cleared out of the young settlements. Politics is breath to the nostrils and strong meat to the bellies of grown men down our way. Found among us are persons who are office-seekers by instinct and office-holders by profession. Whole families, from one generation to another, from father to son and from that



son to his son and his son's son become candidates almost as soon as they have become voters. You expect it of them and are not disappointed. Indeed, this same is true of our whole state. Times change, party lines veer and snarl, new issues come up and flourish for awhile and then are cut down again to make room for newer crops of newer issues still, but the Breckinridges and Clays, the Hardins and Helms, the Breathitts and Trimbles, the Crittendons and Wiskliffes, go on forever and ever asking the support of their fellow-Kentuckians at the polls and frequently are vouchsafed it. But always the winner has cause to know, after winning, that he had a fight.

As goes the state at large, so goes the district and the precinct and the ward. As I was saying just now, we have had warm campaigns before now; but rarely do I recall a campaign of which the early stages showed so feverishly high a temperature as this campaign between Quintus Q. Montjoy and young Tobias Houser for the Democratic nomination for state senator. You see, beneath the surface of things, a woman's personality ran in the under-currents, roiling the waters and soiling the channel. Her name, of course, was not spoken on the hustings<sup>8</sup> or printed in the paper, but her influence was manifest, nevertheless.

There was one woman—and perhaps only one in all that community—who felt she had abundant cause to dislike Judge Priest and all that pertained to him by ties of blood, marriage, affection, or a common interest. And this person was the present wife of the Hon. Horace K. Maydew, and by that same token the former wife of old Mr. Lysander John Curd. Every time she saw Congressman Dabney Prentiss passing by, grand and glorious in his long-tailed coat and his broad black hat and his white tie, which is ever the mark of a statesman who is working at the trade, she

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8. *on the hustings*, in political campaign speeches.

harked back to that day when Judge Priest had obtruded his obstinate bulk between her husband and her husband's dearest ambition; and she remembered that, except for him, she might now be Mrs. Congressman Maydew, going to White House receptions and giving dinners for senators and foreign diplomats and cabinet officers and such. And her thoughts grew bitter as aloes; and with rancor and rage the blood throbbed in her wrists until her bracelets hurt her. Being minded to have part and parcel in the undoing of the Priest plans, she meddled in this fight, giving to Mr. Montjoy the benefit of her counsel and her open, active advocacy.

Perhaps it was because he inclined a flattered ear to the lady's admonitions rather than to her husband's subtler chidings that Mr. Montjoy confirmed the astute Mr. Barnhill's forebodings and refused to stand without hitching. He backed and he filled;<sup>9</sup> he kicked over the traces and got tangled in the gear. He was, as it turned out, neither bridle-wise nor harness-broken. In short he was an amateur in politics, with an amateur's faults. He took the stump early, which was all well and good, because in Red Gravel County if a candidate can't talk to the voters and won't try, he might just as well fold up his tents like the Arab and take his doll rags and go on about his business, if he has any business. But against the guidance and the best judgment of the man who had led him forth as a candidate, he accepted a challenge from young Houser for a series of joint debates; and whilst Mr. Barnhill and Mr. Bonnin wagged their respective heads in silent disapproval, he repeatedly and persistently made proclamation, in public places and with a loud voice, of the obligation which the community still owed his illustrious grandparent, the inference being that he had inherited the debt and expected to collect it at the polls.

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9. *filled*, went forward.

It is likewise possible that Candidate Montjoy listened overmuch to the well-meant words of Mr. Calhoun Tabscott. This Mr. Calhoun Tabscott esteemed himself a master hand at things political. He should have been, at that. One time or another he had been on opposite sides of every political fence; other times he bestraddled it. He had been a Greenbacker,<sup>10</sup> a Granger, and a Populist, and once, almost but not quite, a Republican. Occasions were when, in rapid succession he flirted with the Single Taxers,<sup>11</sup> and then, with the coy reluctance of one who is half-converted, harkened to the blandishments of the Socialists. Had he been old enough he would have been either a Know-Nothing<sup>12</sup> or a Whig—either or perhaps both. In 1896 he quit the Silver Democrats<sup>13</sup> cold, they having obtusely refrained from sending him as a delegate to their national convention. Six weeks later he abandoned the Gold Democrats to their fate because they failed to nominate the right man for president. It was commonly believed he voted the straight Prohibition ticket that year—for spite.

In the matter of his religious convictions, Mr. Tabscott displayed the same elasticity and liberality of choice. In

10. *Greenbacker*, a member of a political party that originated in 1874, the chief contention of which was that our currency should be limited to United States Treasury notes. *Granger*, a member of the Grange, or Patrons of Husbandry, an organization founded in 1867 to promote the interests of the farmers. *Populist*, a member of the People's Party, a political organization formed in 1892. The leading articles in its platform called for an increase in our currency, public control of railways, and limitation in the ownership of land.

11. *Single Taxers*, proposers of a tax system which would levy upon the value of land irrespective of its improvement as the only means of providing revenue for the government.

12. *Know-Nothing*, a member of the American or Know-Nothing Party, prominent in the thirties of the last century. It opposed the election of foreigners and Roman Catholics to any office in America. Its power soon waned. *Whig*, a member of the Whig Party, the predecessor of the present Republican Party.

13. *Silver Democrats*. In the presidential campaign of 1896 the Democratic Party split into two factions over the currency question. The main body of the party supported the proposal for "free and unlimited coinage of silver at the ratio of sixteen to one" (of gold); it nominated William Jennings Bryan for president. The minority wing, which held for a single gold standard, nominated for president Simon A. Buckner of Kentucky.

the rival fields of theology he had ranged far, grazing lightly as he went. When the Cumberland Presbyterians put chime bells in their spire, thereby interfering with his Sunday morning's rest, for he lived just across the street, he took his letter out of the church and thereafter for a period teetered on the verge of agnosticism, even going so far as to buy the works of Voltaire, Paine, and Ingersoll<sup>14</sup> combined and complete in six large volumes. He worshiped a spell with the Episcopalians, and once, during a space of months, the Baptists had hopes of him. Rumor had it that he finally went over to the Methodists, because old Mr. Leatheritt, of the Trades National Bank, who was a Baptist, called<sup>15</sup> one of his loans.

Now, having been twice with Judge Priest in his races for the Circuit Judgeship and twice against him, Mr. Tabscott espoused the Montjoy candidacy and sat in Mr. Montjoy's amen corner, which, indeed, was altogether natural and consistent, since the Tabscotts, as an old family, dated back almost as far and soared almost as high as the Montjoys. There had been a Tabscott who nearly fought a duel himself, once. He sent the challenge and the preliminaries were arranged, but at the eleventh hour a magnanimous impulse triumphed over his lust for blood, and for the sake of his adversary's wife and helpless children, he decided to spare him. Mr. Tabscott felt that as between him and Mr. Montjoy a sentimental bond existed. Mr. Montjoy felt it, too; and they confabbed much together regarding ways, means, and measures somewhat to the annoyance of Senator Maydew, who held fast to the principle that if a master have but one man, the man should have but one master.

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14. *Voltaire, Paine, and Ingersoll*. Voltaire was the assumed name of François Marie Arouet (1694-1778), a famous French writer; Thomas Paine (1737-1809), an English political writer; Robert Ingersoll (1833-1899), an American lawyer and politician. They all held religious views that have established them, in the popular mind, as typical exponents of atheism.

15. *called*, demanded immediate payment.

The first of the joint debates took place, following a barbecue, at Gum Spring Schoolhouse in the northernmost corner of the county, and the second took place three days later at the Old Market House in town, a large crowd attending. Acrimony tinctured Mr. Montjoy's utterances from the outset. Recrimination seemed his forte—that and the claims of honorable antiquity as expressed in the person of its posterity upon a grateful and remembering constituency. He bore heavily upon the fact—or rather the allegation—that Judge Priest was the head and the front of an office-holding oligarchy, who thought they owned the county and the county offices, who took what spoils of office and patronage they coveted for themselves, and sought to parcel the remainder out among their henchmen and their relatives. This political tyranny, this nepotism, must end, he said, and he, Quintus Q. Montjoy, was the instrument chosen and ordained to end it. "Nominate Montjoy and break up the County ring," was the slogan he carried on his printed card. Therein, in especial, might be divined the undermining and capable hand of Senator Maydew. But when at the second meeting between the candidates Mr. Montjoy went still further and touched directly upon alleged personal failings of Judge Priest, one who knew the inner workings of the speaker's mind might have hazarded a guess that here a certain lady's suggestions, privately conveyed, found deliverance in the spoken word.

The issue being thus, by premeditated intent of one of the two gentlemen most interested, so clearly and so acutely defined, the electors took sides promptly, becoming not merely partisans but militant and aggressive partisans. Indeed, citizens who seldom concerned themselves in fights within the party, but were mainly content to vote the straight party ticket after the fighting was over, came out into the open and declared themselves. Perhaps the most

typical exemplar of this conservative class, now turning radical, was offered in the person of Mr. Herman Felsburg. Until this time Mr. Felsburg had held to the view that needless interference in primary elections jibed but poorly with the purveying of clothing to the masses. Former patrons who differed with one politically were apt to go a-buying elsewhere. No matter what your own leanings might be, Mr. Felsburg, facing you across a showcase or a counter, without ever committing himself absolutely, nevertheless managed to convey the impression that, barring that showcase or that counter, there was nothing between him and you, the customer—that in all things you twain were as one and would so continue. Such had been his attitude until now.

When Mr. Montjoy speared at Judge Priest, Judge Priest remained outwardly quite calm and indifferent, but not so Mr. Felsburg. If he did not take the stump in defense of his old friend, at least he frequented its base, in and out of business hours, and in the fervor of his championship he chopped his English finer and twisted his metaphors worse than ever he had done before, which was saying a good deal.

One afternoon, when he returned to the store, after a two-hours' absence spent in sidewalk argument down by the Square, his brother, Mr. Ike Felsburg, who was associated in the firm, ventured to remonstrate with him concerning activities in the curbstone forum, putting the objections on the grounds of commercial expediency. At that he struck an attitude remotely suggestive of a plump and elderly Israelitish Ajax<sup>16</sup> defying the lightning.

"Listen here, you Ike," he stated. "Thirty years I have been building up this here Oak Hall Clothing Emporium,

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16. *Ajax*, a Greek hero of the Trojan War. To prevent the Greeks from carrying off his dead countryman Patroclus, in the darkness of a storm, he prayed to Jove, in no mild terms, that the sky be instantly clear.



and also hats, caps, and gents' furnishing goods. You—you can run around with your lodge meetings and your benevolence societies, and all this time I work here, sweating like rats in a trap, and never is a word said by me to you, vicer or verser. I ask you as brother to brother, ain't that so, or ain't it? It is," continued Mr. Herman, answering his own question.

"But, Hermy," interjected Mr. Ike, put on the defensive by the turn which the argument had taken, "but, Hermy, all what I said to you is that maybe somebody who likes Montjoy would get mad at you for your words and take their custom up the street."

"Let 'em!" proclaimed Mr. Herman with a defiant gesture which almost upset a glass case containing elastic garters and rubber armbands, "let 'em. Anybody which would be a sucker enough to vote for Montjoy against a fine young fellow like this here Houser would also be a sucker enough to let Strauss, Coleman & Levy sell him strickly guaranteed all-wool suitings made out of cotton shoddy, and I wouldn't want his custom under any circumstances whatsoever!"

"But, Hermy!" The protest was growing weaker.

"You wait," shouted Mr. Herman. "You have had your say, and now I would have mine, if you please. I would prefer to get one little word in sideways, if you will be so good. You have just now seen me coming in out of the hot sun hoarse as a tiger from trying to convince a few idiots which they never had any more sense than a dog's hind leg and never will have any, neither. And so you stand there—my own brother—and tell me I am going too far. Going too far? Believe me, Mister Ike Felsburg, I ain't started yet."

He swung on his heel and glared into the depths of his establishment. "Adolph," he commanded, "come here!" Adolph came, he being head salesman in the clothing de-



partment, while Mr. Ike quivered in dumb apprehension, dreading the worst and not knowing what dire form it would assume.

"Adolph," said Mr. Herman with a baleful side-glance at his offending kinsman. "Today we are forming here the Oak Hall and Tobias J. Houser Campaign and Marching Club, made up of proprietors, clerks, other employees, and well-wishers of this here store, of which club I am the president therefrom and you are the secretary. So you will please open up a list right away and tell all the boys they are already members in good standing."

"Well, now, Mr. Herman," said Adolph, "I've always been good friends with Quintus Q. Montjoy and besides which, we are neighbors. No longer ago than only day before yesterday I practically as good as promised him my vote. I thought if you was coming out for Houser, some of us here in the store should be the other way and so—"

Mr. Herman Felsburg stilled him with a look and removed his hat in order to speak with greater emphasis.

"Adolph Dreifus," he said with a deadly solemnity, "you been here in this store a good many years. I would assume you like your job here pretty well. I would consider that you have always been well treated here. Am I right, or am I wrong? I am right! I would assume you would prefer to continue here as before. Yes? No? Yes! You remember the time you wrote with a piece of chalk white marks on the floor so that poor nearsighted Leopold Meyer, who is now dead and done, would think it was scraps of paper and go round all day trying to pick those chalk marks up? With my own eyes I saw you do so and I said nothing. You remember the time you induced me to buy for our trade that order of strictly non-selling Ascot neckties because your own cousin from Cincinnati was salesman handling the line which, from that day to this, we are still carrying those Ascot ties in stock? Did I say anything to

you then? No! Not a word did I say. All those things is years past and I have never spoken with you regarding them until today. But now, Adolph, I must say I am ashamed for you that you should pick on that poor Leopold Meyer, who was blind like a barn-door. I am ashamed for you that you should boost up that cousin of yours from Cincinnati and his bum lines. If I should get more ashamed for you than what I now am, there is no telling what I should do. Adolph, you will please be so good as to remember that all persons that work in this here Oak Hall Clothing Emporium are for Tobe Houser for state senator and no one else, whatsoever. Otherwise, pretty soon, I a h afraid there will be some new faces selling garments around here. Do I make myself plain? I do!

"My brother—the junior partner here"—he dwelt heavily upon the word "junior," making of it a most disqualifying adjective—"he also thinks in this matter the same way as I do. If you don't believe me, ask him for yourself. There he stands like a dumb engraved image—ask him."

And Mr. Ike, making craven surrender, raised both hands in token of his capitulation and weakly murmured, "Yes."

The third of the joint debates, which, as it turned out, was to be the last one of the series, began according to schedule and announcement at the boat-store corner in the presence of an assemblage mustering up in the hundreds. In fact the *Daily Evening News* reporter, in the introductory paragraph of his account, referred to it, I believe, as "a sea of upturned faces." Mr. Montjoy led off first. He had his say, for the better part of an hour, speaking with much fluency from a small board platform that was built up against the side of the old boat store and occasionally, with a fretful shake of his head, raising his voice so it might be heard above the rumbling objurgations of the first mate of the *Cumberland Queen*, who, thirty yards down

the old gravel levee, was urging his black rousters<sup>17</sup> to greater speed as they rolled the last of a consignment of tobacco hogsheads across the lower wharf boat and aboard the *Queen's* boiler deck. Mr. Montjoy concluded with a neat verbal flourish and sat down, mopping his moistened brow with a square of fine cambric. Mr. Montjoy never permitted himself to sweat and in public, at least, he perspired but seldom; but there were times when he did diffuse a perceptible glow.

His rival arose to answer him. He started off—Houser did—by stating that he was not running on his family record for this office. He was running on his own record, such as it was. Briefly, but vigorously, he defended his uncle; a thing he had done before. Continuing, he would say Mr. Montjoy had accused him of being young. He wished to plead guilty to that charge. If it were a defect, to be counted against him, time would probably cure him of it and he thought the Senate Chamber at Frankfort, this state, provided a very suitable spot for the aging process. (Laughter and applause.) He had a rather whimsical drawl and a straightforward, commonplace manner of delivery.

He continued, and I quote:

“Some of you may have heard somewhere casually—that my opponent had a grandfather. Stories to that general effect have been in circulation for quite some little time in this vicinity. I gather from various avenues of information that my opponent is not exactly ashamed of his grandfather. I don't blame him for that. A person without many prospects so far as the future is concerned is not to be blamed for dwelling rather heavily upon the past. But, fellow citizens, doesn't it strike you that in this campaign we are having altogether too much grandfather and not enough grandson? (Renewed laughter from the Houser

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17. *rouster*, a wharf laborer or deck hand.

adherents and Mr. Montjoy's face turning violent red.) It strikes me that the stock is sort of petering out. It strikes me that the whale has bred a minnow.

"And so, in light of these things, I want to make this proposition here and now: I want every man in this county whose grandfather owned eighty slaves and four thousand acres of bottom lands to vote for Mr. Montjoy. And all I ask for myself is that every man whose grandfather didn't own eighty slaves and four thousand acres, should cast his vote for me." (A voice, "My grandpop never owned nary nigger, Toby—I reckon you git my vote without a struggle, boy.")

Along this strain Mr. Houser continued some minutes. It was a line he had not taken in either of his previous arguments with his opponent. He branched away from it to tell what he meant to do for the people of the district in the event of his nomination and election, but presently he came back again to the other theme, while Judge Priest grinned up at him from his place in the edge of the crowd and Mr. Montjoy fidgeted and fumed and wriggled as though the chair upon which he sat had been the top of a moderately hot stove. From these and from yet other signs it might have been noted that Mr. Montjoy, under the nagging semi-humorous goadings of young Houser, was rapidly losing his temper, which, by our awkward Anglo-Saxon mode of speech, is but another way of saying he was not losing his temper at all, but, instead, finding out that he had one.

The *Cumberland Queen* blew her whistle for departure and as the roar died away Mr. Houser might be heard in the act of finishing a sentence touching with gentle irony upon the topic which seemed so to irk and irritate Mr. Montjoy. He never finished it.

Up from his chair sprang Mr. Montjoy, and shook a knotted fist beneath Mr. Houser's nose.

"How dare you?" he demanded. "How dare you indulge in your cheap sarcasm—your low scurrilities—regarding one of the grandest men the Southland ever produced?"

His voice turned falsetto and soared to a slate-pencilly screech:

"I repeat it, sir—how dare you—you underbred ignoramus—you who never knew what it was to have a noble grandfather! Nobody knows who your grandfather was. I doubt whether anybody knows who your father—"

Perhaps it was what Mr. Montjoy appeared to be on the point of asserting. Perhaps it was that his knuckles, as he brandished his fist in Mr. Houser's face, grazed Mr. Houser's cheek.

Mr. Houser stretched forth a solid arm and gripped a handful of sinewy fingers in the lapels of Mr. Montjoy's coat. He didn't strike Mr. Montjoy, but he shook him and he shook him—oh, how he shook him. He shook him up and down and back and forth and to and fro and forward and rearward; shook him until his collar came undone and his nose glasses flew off into space; shook him until his hair came down in his eyes and his teeth rattled in his jaw; shook him into limp, breathless, voiceless helplessness, and then holding him, dangling and flopping for a moment, slapped him once very gently, almost as a mother might slap an erring child of exceedingly tender years; and dropped the limp form, and stepped over it and climbed down off the platform into the midst of the excited crowd. The third of the series of the joint debates was ended; also the series itself.

Judge Priest instantly shoved forward, his size and his impetuosity clearing the path for him through a press of lesser and less determined bodies. He thrust a firm hand into the crook of his nephew's arm and led him off up the street clear of those who might have sought either to com-

pliment or to reprehend the young man. As they went away linked together thus, it was observed that the judge wore upon his broad face a look of sore distress and it was overheard that he grievously lamented the most regrettable occurrence which had just transpired and that openly he reproached young Houser for his elemental response to the verbal attacks of Mr. Montjoy and, in view of the profound physical and spiritual shock to Mr. Montjoy's well-known pride and dignity, that he expressed a deep concern for the possible outcome. Upon this last head, he was particularly and shrilly emphatic.

In such a fashion, with the nephew striving vainly to speak in his own defense and with the uncle as constantly interrupting to reprimand him and to warn him of the peril he had brought upon his head, and all in so loud a voice as to be clearly audible to any persons hovering near by, the pair continued upon their journey until they reached Soule's Drug Store. There, with a final sorrowful nod of the judge's head and a final shake of his admonishing forefinger, they parted. The younger man departed, presumably for his home, to meditate upon his foolhardy conduct, and the older went inside the store and retired to Mr. Soule's little box of an office at the rear, hard by the prescription case. Carefully closing the door after him to insure privacy, he remained there for upwards of an hour, engaged undoubtedly in melancholy reflections touching upon the outbreak of his most culpable kinsman and upon the conceivable consequences. He must have done some writing, too, for when at length he emerged he was holding in one hand a sealed envelope. Summoning to him Logan Eaker, Mr. Soule's colored errand boy, he intrusted the note to Logan, along with a quarter of a dollar for messenger hire, and sent the black boy away. From this circumstance several persons who chanced to be in Soule's



hypothesized that very probably the judge had taken it upon himself to write Mr. Montjoy a note of apology in the name of his nephew and of himself. However, this upon the part of the onlookers was but a supposition. They merely were engaged in the old practice, so hallowed among bystanders, of putting two and two together, by such process sometimes attaining a total of four, and sometimes not.

As regards, on the other hand, Quintus Q. Montjoy, he retained no distinct recollection of the passage homeward, following his mishandling by Tobias J. Houser. For the time a seething confusion ruled his being. Mingled emotions of chagrin, rage, and shame—but most of all rage—boiled in his brain until the top of his skull threatened to come right off. Since he was a schoolboy until now, none had laid so much as an impious finger upon him. For the first time in his life he felt the warm strong desire to shed human blood, to see it spatter and pour forth in red streams. The spirit of his grandfather waked and walked within him; anyway, it is but fair to assume that it did so.

Somebody must have rebuttoned Mr. Montjoy's collar for him and readjusted his necktie. Somebody else of equally uncertain identity must have salvaged his glasses and restored them to their customary place on the bridge of his slender nose. True, he preserved no memory of these details. But when, half an hour after the encounter, a hired hack deposited him at his yard gate and when Mr. Barnhill, who it would appear dimly and almost as a figment from a troubled dream, accompanied him on the ride, had dismounted and had volunteered to help him alight from the vehicle, meanwhile offering words intended to be sympathetic, Mr. Montjoy found collar, necktie, and glasses all properly bestowed.

Within the sanctified and solitary precincts of his library, beneath the grim, limned eyes of his ancestor, Mr. Montjoy reattained a measure of outward calm and of consecutive



thought; coincidently with these a tremendous resolution began to harden inside of him. Presently as he walked the floor, alternately clenching and unclenching his hands, the telephone bell sounded. Answering the call, he heard coming across the line the familiar voice of one, who, in the temporary absence of her husband from the city, now undertook to offer advice. It would seem that Mrs. Maydew had but heard of the brutal assault perpetrated upon her friend; she was properly indignant and more than properly desirous that a just vengeance be exacted. It would seem in this connection she had certain vigorous suggestions to offer. And finally it would seem she had just seen the evening paper and desired to know whether Mr. Montjoy had seen his copy?

Mr. Montjoy had not. After a short interchange of views, when, from intensity of feeling, the lady fairly made the wire sibilate and sing as her words sped over it, she rang off and Mr. Montjoy summoned his butler. His was the only roof in town which harbored a butler beneath it. Other families had male servants beneath it—of color—who performed duties similar to those performed by Mr. Montjoy's man, but they didn't call these functionaries butlers and Mr. Montjoy did. He sent the butler out into the yard to get the paper, which a boy had flung over the fence palings in a twisted wisp. And when the butler brought it to him he opened, to read, not the *Daily Evening News's* highly impartial account of the affair at the boat store corner—that could come later—but to read first of all a card signed "Veritas" which was printed at the bottom of the second column of the second inside page, immediately following the editorial comment of the day. It was this card to which young Mrs. Maydew had particularly directed his attention.

He bent his head and he read. The individual who chose to hide behind the *nom de plume* of "Veritas" wrote

briefly and to the point. At the outset he confessed himself as one who harbored old-fashioned ideals. Therefore he abhorred the personal altercations which in these latter and degenerate days so often marred the course of public discussions between gentlemen entertaining opposite views upon public problems or private matters. And still more did he deplore the common street brawls, not unmarked by the use of lethal weapons and sometimes by tragically fatal results to one or the other of the parties engaged, which had been known before now to eventuate from the giving and taking of the offensive word or blow. Hardly need the writer to add that he had in mind the unfortunate affray of even date in a certain populous quarter of our city. Without mentioning names, he, "Veritas," took that deplorable occurrence for his present text. It had inspired him to utter these words of protest against the vulgarity, the coarseness, and the crassness of the methods employed for the appeasing of individual and personal wrongs. How much more dignified, how much more in keeping with the traditions of the soil, and the very history of this proud old commonwealth, was the system formerly in vogue among gentlemen for the adjudication of their private misunderstandings! Truly enough the law no longer sanctioned the employment of the *code duello*;<sup>18</sup> indeed, for the matter of that, the law of the land had never openly sanctioned it; but once upon a time a jealous regard for his own outraged honor had been deemed sufficient to lift a Southern gentleman to extremes above the mere written letter of the statutes. "*O tempora, O mores!*"<sup>19</sup> Oh, for the good old days!" And then came the signature.

Barely had Mr. Montjoy concluded the reading and the

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18. *code duello*, the dueling code.

19. *O tempora, O mores!* O times, O customs! (*Tempora et mores mutantur, et in illis mutamur*: Times and manners change, and we change with them.)

rereading of this, when Mr. Calhoun Tabscott was announced and promptly entered to proffer his hand and something more, besides. Mr. Tabscott carried with him a copy of the *Daily Evening News* opened at the inside page. His nostrils expanded with emotion, his form shook with it.

In ten words these two—Mr. Montjoy as the person aggrieved and Mr. Tabscott as his next friend—found themselves in perfect accord as to the course which now should be pursued. At once, then, Montjoy sat down at his mahogany writing desk and Mr. Tabscott sat down behind him where he could look over the other's shoulder and together they engaged in the labors of literary composition.

But just before he seated himself Mr. Montjoy pointed a quivering finger at the desk and, in a voice which shook with restrained determination, he said impressively, in fact, dramatically:

“Calhoun Tabscott, that desk belonged to my grandfather, the old General. He used it all his life—in Virginia first and then out here. At this moment, Calhoun Tabscott, I can almost feel him hovering above me, waiting to guide my pen.”

And Mr. Tabscott said he felt that way about it, himself.

In spare moments at home Judge Priest was addicted to the game of croquet. He played it persistently and very badly. In his side yard under his dining-room window rusted wickets stood in the ordained geometric pattern between painted goal posts, and in a box under a rustic bench in the little, tottery summer-house beneath the largest of the judge's silver-leaf poplar trees were kept the balls and the mallets—which latter instruments the judge insisted on calling mauls. And here in this open space,

he might be found on many a fine afternoon congenially employed, with some neighborhood crony or a chance caller for his antagonist. Often, of mornings, when he had a half hour or so of leisure, he practiced shots alone.

On the morning which immediately followed the day of the broken-off joint debate at the boat-store corner, he was so engaged. He had his ball in excellent alignment and fair distance of the center wickets, and was stooping to deliver the stroke when he became aware of his nephew approaching him hurriedly across the wide lawn.

"Uncle Billy," began that straightforward young man, "something has happened, and I've come to you with it right off."

"Son," said the judge, straightening up reluctantly, "something happens purty nigh every day. Whut's on your mind this mornin'?"

"Well, suh, I was eating breakfast a little bit ago, when that Cal Tabscott came to the front door. He sent word he wouldn't come in; so I went out to the door to see what it was he wanted. He was standing there stiff and formal as a ramrod, all dressed up in his Sunday clothes, and wearing a pair of gloves, too—this weather! And he bowed without a word and handed me a letter, and when I opened it it was a challenge from Quint Montjoy—a challenge to fight a duel with him, me to name the weapons, the time, and the place! That's what I've got to tell you."

His uncle's eyes opened innocently wide.

"Boy, you don't tell me?" he said. "And whut did you do then?"

"Well, suh, I came within an ace of just hauling off and mashing that blamed idiot in the mouth—coming to my door with a challenge for a duel! But I remembered what you told me yesterday about keeping my temper and I didn't do it. Then I started to tear up that fool note and throw the pieces in his face."

"You didn't do that neither, did you?" demanded the judge quickly, with alarm in his voice. "You kept it?"

"I didn't do that either and I kept the note," replied the younger man, answering both questions at once. "I shut the door in Tabscott's face and left him on the doorstep and then I went and put on my hat and came right on over here to see you. Here's the note—I brought it along with me."

His uncle took from him the single sheet of note paper and adjusted his specs. He gazed admiringly for a moment at the embossed family crest at the top and read its contents through slowly.

"Ah hah," he said; "seems to be regular in every respect. don't it? Polite, too. To the best of my remembrance, I never seen one of these challenges before, but I should judge this here one is got up strictly accordin' to the Code. Son, our ancestors certainly were the great hands for goin' accordin' to the Codes, weren't they? If it wasn't one Code, it was another, with them old fellows. Quintus Q. Montjoy writes a nice hand, don't he?"

With great care he folded the note along its original crease, handling it as though it had been a fragile document of immense value and meanwhile humming a little tuneless tune abstractedly. Still humming, he put the paper in an ancient letter wallet, and wrapped a leather string about the wallet, and returned wallet and string to the breast pocket of his black seersucker coat.

"Son," he said when all this had been accomplished, "I reckon you done the right thing in comin' straight to me. I must compliment you."

"Yes, suh, much obliged," said young Houser, "but Uncle Billy, what would you advise my doing now?"

He rubbed his forehead in perplexity.

"Why, nothin'—nothin' a'tall," bade his uncle, as though surprised at any suggestion of uncertainty upon the

nephew's part. "You ain't got a thing to do, but jest to go on back home and finish up your breakfast. It ain't wise to start the day on an empty stomach, ever. After that, ef I was you, I would put in the remainder of the day remainin' perfectly ca'm and collected, and whilst so engaged I wouldn't say nothin' to nobody about havin' received a challenge to fight a duel." He regripped his mallet. "Son, watch me make this shot." He stopped and squinted along the imaginary line from his ball to the wicket.

"But, Uncle Billy, I——"

"Son, please don't interrupt me ag'in. Jimmy Bagby is comin' over this evenin' to play off a tie match with me, and I aim to be in shape fur him when he comes. Now run along on back home like I told you to and keep your mouth shet."

The judge whacked his ball and made an effective shot—or rather an effective miss—and Tobe Houser betook himself away wagging his puzzled head in a vain effort to fathom the enigma of his relative's cryptic behavior.

Approximately thirty-six hours passed without public developments which might be construed as relating to the matter chiefly in hand; and then in the early afternoon young Houser returned to the house of his uncle, this time finding its owner stretched out for his after-dinner nap upon an old and squashy leather couch in the big old-timey sitting-room. The judge wasn't quite asleep yet. He roused as his nephew entered.

"Uncle Billy," began young Houser, without preamble, "you told me yesterday not to do anything, and I've obeyed your orders, although I didn't understand what you were driving at, exactly; but now I must do something if I aim to keep my self-respect or to stay in this race—either one or both. Unless I take up the dare he's laid down in front



of me, Montjoy's going to brand me on the stump as a coward. Yes, suh, that's his intention—— Oh, it came to me straight. It seems Mrs. Horace K. Maydew told old Mrs. Whitridge this morning in strict confidence and Mrs. Whitridge just took her foot in her hand and put out to tell Aunt Puss Lockfoot and Aunt Puss didn't lose any time getting through the alley gate into my back yard to tell my wife.

"Yes, suh, if I keep silent and don't take any notice of his challenge, Montjoy's going to get up before this whole town at mass meeting and denounce me as a coward—he's going to say I'm willing enough to take advantage of being younger and stronger than he is to attack him with my bare hands, but that I'm afraid to back up my act where it puts my hide in danger. I know mighty good and well who's behind him, egging him on—I can see her finger in it plain enough. She hopes to see me humiliated and she hopes to see your chances hurt in your next race. She aims to strike at you through me and ruin us both, if she can.

"But, Uncle Billy, all that being so doesn't alter the situation so far as I'm concerned. The man doesn't live that can stand up and brand me as a sneaking, quitting coward and not have to answer for it. One way or another, it will come to a pass where there's bound to be shooting. I've just got to do something and do it quick."

"Well, son," said Judge Priest, still flat on his back, "I sort of figgered it out that things might be takin' some sech a turn as this. I've heard a few of the rumors that're beginnin' to creep round, myse'f. I reckon, after all, you will have to answer Mister Montjoy. In fact, I've taken the trouble this mornin' to wrop up your answer and have it all ready to be sent over to Mister Montjoy's place of residence by the hands of my boy Jeff."

"You wrapped it up?" queried Houser, bewildered again.



"That's whut I said—I wropped it up," answered the judge. He heaved himself upright and crossed the room to his old writing table that stood alongside one of the low front windows and from the desk took up a large squarish object, securely tied up in white paper with an address written upon one of its flat surfaces.

"Jeff!" he called, "oh, you Jeff."

"Why, Uncle Billy, that looks like a book to me," said Mr. Houser. Assuredly, this was a most mystified young man.

"It ain't no box of sugar kisses—you kin be shore of that much, anyway," stated that inscrutable uncle of his. "You're still 'willin', ain't you, son, to set quiet and be guided by me in this matter?"

"Yes, suh, I am. That is, I'm perfectly willing to take your advice up to a certain point, but——"

"Then set right still and do so," commanded Judge Priest. "I'm goin' to take you into my confidences jest as soon as I see how my way of doin' the thing works out. We oughter git some definite results before dark this evenin'. And listen here, son, a minute—when all's said and done, even Quintus Q. Montjoy, Esquire, ain't no more of a stickler for follering after the Code than whut I am. I'm jest ez full of time-hallowed precedents ez he is—and maybe even more so."

"Callin' me, Jedge?" The speaker was Jefferson Poin-dexter, who appeared at the door leading into the hall.

"Yes, I was—been callin' you fur a half hour—more or less," stated his master. "Jeff, you take this here parcel over to Mister Quintus Q. Montjoy's and present it with the compliments of Mister Houser. You needn't wait fur an answer—jest come back. I reckon there won't be no answer fur some little time."

He turned again to his nephew with the air of a man

who, having disposed of all immediate and pressing business affairs, is bent now upon pleasurable relaxation.

"Son, if you ain't got nothin' better to do this evenin', I wish't you'd stay here and keep score fur the tournament. Playing crokay, I licked that poor old Jimmy Bagby yis-tiddy, and now he wants to git even." The Judge spoke vaingloriously. "He's skeered to tackle me again single-handed, I reckon. So him and Father Tom Minor are comin' over here to play me and Herman Felsburg a match game fur the crokay champeenship of Clay Street and adjacent thoroughfares. They oughter be here almost any minute now—I was jest layin' here, waitin' fur 'em and sort of souplin' up my muscles."

Playing magnificently as partners, Father Minor and Sergeant Bagby achieved a signal victory—score three to one—over the Felsburg-Priest team. The players, with the official referee who maintained a somewhat abstracted, not to say a pestered, air, were sitting in the little summer-house, cooling off after the ardors of the sport. Jeff Poin-dexter had been dispatched indoors, to the dining-room sideboard, to mix and fetch the customary refreshments. The editor of the *Daily Evening News*, who was by way also of being chief news-gatherer of that dependable and popular journal, came up the street from the corner below and halted outside the fence.

"Howdy, gentlemen!" over the paling he greeted them generally. "I've got some news for you-all. I came out of my way, going back to the office to tell you." He singled out the Judge from the group. "Oh, you *Veritas*!" he called, jovially.

"Sh-h-h, Henry, don't be callin' me that," spoke up Judge Priest with a warning glance about him and a heavy wink at the editor. "Somebody that's not in the family

might hear you and git a false and misleadin' notion about the presidin' circuit judge of this district. What's your news?"

"Well," said Mr. Tompkins, "it's sort of unprofessional to be revealing the facts before they're put in type, but I reckon it's no great breach of ethics to tell a secret to an occasional contributor of signed communications—" he indicated Judge Priest, archly— "and the contributor's close friends and relatives. Anyhow, you'd all know it anyhow as soon as the paper comes out. Quintus Q. Montjoy is withdrawing from the race for State Senator."

"What?" several voices spoke the word in chorus, only Sergeant Bagby pronounced it *Whut* and Mr. Felsburg sounded the *W* with the sound of *V* as in "Vocal."

"Montjoy quits. I've got his card of withdrawal right here in my pocket, now. Tobe, allow me to congratulate you on your prospect of getting the nomination without any opposition at the polls."

"Quits, does he?" echoed Judge Priest. "Well, do you boys know, I ain't surprised. I've been lookin' fur him to do somethin' of that nature fur the last two hours. I wonder whut delayed him?" He addressed the query to space.

"He gives some reasons—maybe, yes?" asked Mr. Felsburg, releasing Mr. Houser's hand, which he had been shaking with an explosive warmth.

"Oh, yes," said Editor Tompkins. "I suppose he felt as if he had to do that. The principal reason he gives is that he finds he cannot spare the time from his business interests for making an extended canvass—and also his repugnance to engaging further in a controversy with a man who so far forgets himself as to resort to physical violence in the course of a joint debate upon the issues of the day. That's a nice little farewell side-slap at you, Houser."

"But I gleaned from what I picked up after I got over

to Montjoy's in answer to his telephone message asking me to call that there may have been other reasons which are not set forth in his card of withdrawal," continued Mr. Tompkins. "In fact, about the time I got over there—to his house—Hod Maydew arrived in a free state of perspiration and excitement—Hod's been up in Louisville on business, you know, and didn't get in until the two-thirty train came—and I rather gathered from what he said a little bit ago to Quintus Q., in the privacy of the dining-room while I was waiting in the library, that he was considerably put out about something. His voice sounded peeved—especially when he was calling Montjoy's attention to the fact that even if he should win the race now, he wouldn't be able to take the oath of office. Anyhow, I think that's what he was saying."

"Say, Judge, just for curiosity's sake now and strictly between ourselves—just what was the message, or whatever it was, that you sent over to Montjoy's right after dinner? I overheard something about that, too."

"Oh, that?" said the judge, as all eyes turned in his direction. "That was jest a spare copy of the Code that I happened to have 'round the house—with a page in it marked and turned down."

"The Code—what Code?" Mr. Tompkins pressed the point like the alert collector of news that he was.

"The Code and the Statutes<sup>20</sup>—with the accent on the Code," answered the old judge, simply. "Although, speakin' pussonally, I pay more attention to the Statutes than some folks do. In fact it would seem like some persons who are reasonably well informed on most subjects—ancestors fur instance—ain't never took the time to peruse them old Statutes of ourn with the care they should give to

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<sup>20.</sup> *The Code and the Statutes.* The code is a systematic arrangement of the existing laws; statutes are laws enacted by the legislature.

'em ef they're aimin' to engage in the job of bein' a statesman." He faced his nephew. "Tobe, my son, this oughter be a great lesson to you—it's a work that'll bear consid'able study from time to time. I'm afeared you ain't ez well posted on the subject ez you should be. Well, this is a mighty good time to begin. You kin take your first lesson right now."

He stooped and lifted the lid of the croquet box, beneath the bench upon which they had been sitting, and fetched forth a large, heavy volume, bound in splotchy law calf. "I put my other copy here jest a little while ago, thinkin' somebody might be interested later in its contents," he explained as he ran through the leaves until he came to a certain page. Upon that page, with a blunt forefinger, he indicated a certain paragraph as he handed the tome over to his nephew.

"There, Tobe," he ordered, "you've got a good strong voice. Read this here section—aloud."

So then, while the others listened, with slowly widening grins of comprehension upon their faces, and while Judge Priest stood alongside, smiling softly, young Tobe read. And what he read was this:

"OATH TO BE TAKEN BY ALL OFFICERS—FORM OF. Members of the General Assembly and all officers, before they enter upon the execution of the duties of their respective offices, and all members of the bar, before they enter upon practice of their profession, shall take the following oath or affirmation: I do solemnly swear (or affirm, as the case may be) that I will support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of this Commonwealth, and be faithful and true to the Commonwealth of Kentucky so long as I continue a citizen thereof, and that I will faithfully execute, to the best of my ability, the office of —————

— according to law; and I solemnly swear (or affirm) that since the adoption of the present Constitution, I, being a citizen of this State, have not fought a duel with deadly weapons within this State, nor out of it, nor have I sent or accepted a challenge to fight a duel with deadly weapons, nor have I acted as second in carrying a challenge, nor aided or assisted any person thus offending, so help me God.”

Having read it aloud, young Houser now reread it silently to himself. He was rather a slow-thinking and direct-minded person. Perhaps time was needed for the full force and effect of the subject-matter to soak into him. It was Mr. Tompkins who spoke next.

“Judge Priest,” he said, “what do you suppose those two fellows over yonder at Montjoy’s are thinking about you right now?”

“Henry,” said Judge Priest, “fur thinkin’ whut they do about me, I reckon both of them boys could be churched.”<sup>21</sup>

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21. *churched*, disciplined by the church.

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS

“According to the Code” was first published in *The Saturday Evening Post*.

1. “According to the Code” is one of a series of stories in which Judge Priest is the leading character and Red Gravel County, Kentucky, the background. These stories have been collected in three volumes: *Back Home, Being the Narrative of Judge Priest and His People* (1912); *Old Judge Priest* (1916); and *Those Times and These* (1917). The description of Judge Priest’s character given in the other stories in the series is partly relied upon in “According to the Code,” where the Judge is introduced fairly late in the action.

Judge Priest is the political "boss" of Red Gravel County. He is a quaint character of the older generation, thoroughly honest and kind, but keen and shrewd. His shrewdness, which those who do not know him greatly underestimate, is hidden behind a simple and homely manner. He is entirely unassuming, and he is delightfully lazy, but he has a keen mind and a fine sense of human values.

With the Judge as the central character, Irvin Cobb has in the Old Judge Priest narratives represented the everyday life and manners of a picturesque part of our country in the fashion of the writers of local-color stories. The chief interest in the life of the village which Cobb draws is political, for through politics the community expresses most clearly its feelings, opinions, prejudices, and ideals. The conflict, in the main, is between the old order which is passing and the new order which has not quite gained control. Before Cobb wrote these Kentucky stories, the Southerner of fiction and of the stage was usually either a broken-down aristocrat or a "poor white." But Cobb writes of the people of Kentucky as he knew them in his boyhood.

2. The Old Judge Priest stories have been very popular. Their popularity has been due in part to the likable qualities of the Judge's character and to his stand for principles which most of us strongly hold. He contends against pretense, sham, and false show wherever they appear, especially as they present themselves as claims for social distinction. Furthermore, we are attracted by good sense and cleverness when the possessor of these qualities does not parade them.

3. In how many ways are Montjoy and Hauser contrasted? Why do we delight in the trick by which Montjoy is caught? Show how the older aristocratic life and the new democratic life of the community are represented in the story. What are the two codes which come into conflict? How does the representation of Judge Priest's character agree with what is said in the Introduction (page xv) about the dominant character of a short story? How do you imagine he was dressed?

4. Notice the length of the story. Is it a tale or an economically made short story? Does it tell a single story? Do you find any incidents or characters the author could have omitted without doing harm to his story? Contrast the structure of



"According to the Code" with that of "They Grind Exceeding Small." Show how the material and the setting of the two stories demand different technical treatments.

5. Notice the easy and leisurely manner in which the story is related. Is it appropriate to the characters and the atmosphere? Do you find instances of exaggerated statements or of understatements intentionally made? What relation do you find between this type of humor and Mark Twain's? Is this Cobb's usual manner and style? Before answering this question, you should read several other Old Judge Priest narratives and also Cobb's "Snake Doctor" (O. Henry, 1922) and "The Belled Buzzard" (in *Short Stories by Present-Day Authors*, Pence).

*Suggested Reading.*—Other small town stories: *The Real Motive* by Dorothy Canfield; *In a Little Town* by Rupert Hughes; *Folks Back Home* by Eugene Wood; *Peace in Friendship Village* by Zona Gale; "The Trial in Tom Belcher's Store" by Samuel A. Derieux (O. Henry, 1919); "April 25th, As Usual" by Edna Ferber (O. Henry, 1919). For a similar type of humor see "Tact" and "Mummery" by Thomas Beer (O. Henry, 1921, 1922).

*Biographical Note.*—Irvin S. Cobb, probably the most popular magazine writer of our day, is a native of Kentucky, where he was born in 1876. He was engaged in newspaper work in his native state from 1895 to 1904 and in New York City from 1904 to 1911. From 1911 to 1922 he was a staff contributor to *The Saturday Evening Post*, and since that time he has been on the staff of the *Cosmopolitan*. He represented the former as correspondent in Europe during the World War. The French government made him a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor in 1918. More than a score of volumes of his short stories, essays, and humorous skits have been published.

## COBBLER'S WAX\*

ACHMED ABDULLAH

They called him P'i Hsiao, or Cobbler's Wax, in Pell Street,<sup>1</sup> because, to quote Nag Hop Fat, the soothsayer, "he is soft, being helpless; hard, being proud; and his skin is dark."

The latter statement was not exactly true. The man's complexion was not dark. It glowed coppery red, stamping him as one apart from the waxen-faced Cantonese whose lives were pinched between the Bowery and Mulberry Street like a thin wedge of Asia driving apart bartering, narrow-chested Russian Jews and shrill Sicilians, and who understood the necessity of putting new twists into their Mongol brains in order to meet the beggar competition of Europe's back stairs. Which they did, to the confusion of the latter and the sound enrichment of certain accounts carried under various picturesque ledger headings by the Hongkong & Shanghai Banking Corporation, thousands of miles away.

But there was no credit entry headed by the square Chinese ideographs<sup>2</sup> that correspond to P'i Hsiao, though the bearer of the name had come to America twenty-five years earlier.

The tale of his coming is a clanking, spirited *Odyssey*.<sup>3</sup> It has never been told, and never can be. It would impli-

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\*From *The Honorable Gentleman* by Achmed Abdullah. Courtesy of the author and of G. P. Putnam's Sons, Publishers, New York and London.

1. *Pell Street*, in the Chinese quarter of New York City.

2. *ideographs*, pictures or symbols to represent objects or ideas, the system of writing employed by the Chinese.

3. *Odyssey*, here, *story*. It refers to Homer's *Odyssey*, which tells the story of the ten years' wandering of the Greek hero Odysseus (Latin, Ulysses) after the fall of Troy.

cate too many people on both sides of the Pacific; for there is on the books of the republic a law called the Asiatic Exclusion Act,<sup>4</sup> which puts the yellow man beneath the black in human worth and civic respect, and to circumvent which the yellow aspirant after American coin must travel hard roads and pay exorbitant "squeezes."<sup>5</sup>

Cobbler's Wax traveled the roads. He paid gold to many. To name them all would give an ethnographical chart of the world's less desirable breeds and a sociological survey of many of the far East's gaudy rogues.

But let us pick out a few. There was the half-caste inn-keeper in Shanghai whose patronymic was aristocratic and melodious—something like Da Silva de Villareal da Costa—and who, aided and abetted by a Kamsuh brave<sup>6</sup> on whose shaven poll had been a blood-price ever since the Boxer affair,<sup>7</sup> met Cobbler's Wax and thirty other prospective yellow emigrants in a first-chop chandoo place<sup>8</sup> west of the Ta Kao Tien Temple. Came secondly a ruffianly Finnish skipper, wanted for murder in Riga and for arson in Palermo, who took Cobbler's Wax and his associates to Vladivostok and into the tranquil presence of a Nanking compradore<sup>9</sup> with gold-incased finger-nails and a charming taste in early Ming<sup>10</sup> porcelain. This gentleman passed the

4. *Exclusion Act.* The Geary Act, passed by Congress in 1892, practically excluded Chinese immigration into the United States.

5. *squeezes, graft.*

6. *Kamsuh brave,* a native of the Chinese province of Kamsuh, whose men are noted for their rough bravery.

7. *Boxer affair.* The Boxer Uprising, which took place in 1900, resulted in what the Chinese considered unfair treatment of their nation by other countries. During the uprising foreign legations in Peking were besieged; troops were sent to quell the disturbance by Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Japan, and the United States.

8. *first-chop chandoo place,* a first-rate opium place.

9. *compradore,* commission merchant in China or Japan of a foreign business house.

10. *Ming,* of the Ming, or Bright, dynasty, that of the family which came to the Chinese throne in the fourteenth century under Chu Yüen-chang, when great encouragement was given by the government to the cultivation of fine arts and literature.

adventurers through yet two more middlemen to a Japanese skipper who flaunted British naturalization papers and called himself Macdonald Ichiban. He was supposed to clear from Vladivostok direct for the Golden Gate, but managed to cruise off the British Columbia coast—"contrary head winds, half a gale," he wrote in the log, and lied—until a narrow-flanked clipper shot out from the fogs of Queen Charlotte Sound,<sup>11</sup> and took away the living freight, drowning only four. The remainder had an interview the next day with a provincial government inspector in Victoria, British Columbia, who drowned his Scotch conscience in his Scotch greed.

Came a stormy night and a chugging motor-boat trip across the Straits of San Juan de Fuca;<sup>12</sup> a dumping overboard into the greasy, swirling sea a mile from land, near a floating buoy the lights of which, for the occasion, had been changed from red to green; a great screaming wave that swallowed all the merry band of Mongol rovers with the exception of Cobbler's Wax; the latter's swim ashore, and his yellow hand reaching out from the stinking water and gripping the slippery piles at the foot of Yeslerway,<sup>13</sup> in the city of Seattle.

All this for a reason which, years later, gurgled in a woman's death-cry, and the toil of endless months to pay back the debts incurred by the way, with interest piling on interest. Rightly so, since the different gentlemen, from the Shanghai innkeeper to the engineer of the motor-boat, had done their shares of the transaction on speculation, and most of the profits had already been wiped out through the inconsiderate wholesale drowning at the end of the journey.

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11. *Queen Charlotte Sound* lies between North Vancouver Island and the mainland of British Columbia.

12. *the Straits of San Juan de Fuca* lie between Vancouver Island and the State of Washington.

13. *Yeslerway*, a street in Seattle, Washington, at the foot of which are docks.

"Pay! pay! pay!" was the cry, with the heavy hand of the Chinese masonic lodge in San Francisco squeezing and bullying and striking when spirit rebelled or pocket-book flattened.

Those were the years when Cobbler's Wax worked up and down the slope, from Seattle to San Diego and back, in canneries and lumber-camps, in a forgotten Idaho placer claim, in California wine-vats and Utah chuck-wagons,<sup>14</sup> through to Chicago, clear through to New York, to the warm, spicy, homelike reek of Pell Street. Two decades of toil, a yellow man's toil.

And then one hazy, lilting spring evening he stood near the corner of the Bowery, free from debt, smiling, ready to strike out for himself, to labor another eighteen or twenty-eight or thirty-eight years in order to forget the thing which was calling him back to China in the watches of the night. On that particular evening a drunken Irish policeman chanced to be homesick and to turn into Pell Street, singing an ancient and riotous stave of the County Armagh.

"Down by the tan-yar-rd soide," quavered his sentimental, alcoholic hiccup, and as he passed beneath a scarlet-and-gold Chinese signboard, bearing in archaic Mandarin<sup>15</sup> characters the naïve legend, "No credit given. Former customers have taught caution," he brushed against Cobbler's Wax, who was looking up at the cloud-whipped moon, a slow smile curling his lips.

The song broke off and gave way to a belligerent query:

"An' what may ye be grinnin' about?" Cobbler's Wax had little English. So he winked a heavy-lidded eye with amiable intent at the foreign devil.

"What may ye be grinnin' about?" repeated the latter,

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14. *chuck-wagons*, wagons provided with a stove and food to supply meals for camping or traveling parties.

15. *Mandarin*, pertaining to the most ancient dialect of the Chinese.

with a gesture of his hickory. "An' is it maybe the pitch of me tenor ye're takin' exception to?"

Still the other smiled.

"Tsieh-kwang—hai—tsieh-kwant?" he sing-songed, politely inquiring if he was in the gentleman's way.

But the policeman misunderstood.

"Pokin' fun at me, are ye?" he asked. "Faith, I'll wipe that smile off yer dirty mug, ye yellow haythen!" and *whang* sobbed the point of the hickory.

Cobbler's Wax was taken unawares. He raised his right to defend himself, and the Irishman fell upon him with fist and stick and heavy-nailed boots, striking and kicking in blind, murderous fury. He saw red, and struck again and again and again with all his brute strength.

The chances are that, with the whisky fumes cleared from his brain, regret followed. For instead of arresting Cobbler's Wax, he let him lie where he had collapsed, a bleeding, broken, moaning bundle, and contented himself with reporting at the station that he had been set upon by three large and ferocious haythen Chinks; but that, faith, he gave 'em the edge of his club an' the toe of his boot an' by the rock of Cashel!<sup>16</sup> what did them dirty haythens do but run away, bad luck to 'em! Wherefore he received praise.

As to Cobbler's Wax, the results of Celtic homesickness mixed with Celtic whisky were far-reaching. He became a cripple for life, his right elbow shattered, his neck twisted to one side, giving him the look of a hunchback, his left eye-socket staring empty, his lungs affected, his health ruined. Hereafter he was an object of Pell Street charity, which is akin to Pell Street humor, which latter is identical with Pell Street cruelty.

"Paper tiger!" the little almond-eyed urchins shouted

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16. *rock of Cashel*, a three-hundred foot limestone pile near the town of Cashel in the County of Tipperary, Ireland, where there is an interesting group of ruins of early Saxon and Celtic civilizations.



after him, since a tiger made of paper cannot bite and, by the same token, a man whose hands are palsied cannot strike.

"Hey! a hunchback bowing! What exaggeration!" Nag Sen Yat, the opium merchant, remarked with ready wit when he saw him make obeisance in front of the crimson-stained joss house.<sup>17</sup>

"When one is eating one's own, one does not eat to repletion; when one is eating another's, one eats till the tears run," was the sententious comment of Nag Hong Fah, the pouchy proprietor of the Great Shanghai Chop-Suey Palace, when he gave to him a bowl filled with left-over salt duck, pickled cabbage, and soy.

It would be a ludicrous hunting after sentimental effect to say that these small amenities of Mongol life touched Cobbler's Wax morally or ethically; for he, too, was a yellow man. He knew that Pell Street was right in its treatment of him and that he would have done likewise had the position been reversed.

"I am a cripple," he said to Miss Edith Rutter, the Social Settlement investigator, through the intermedium of Liu Kuang, the court interpreter, when the little lady stopped him and tried to pour the healing oil of Anglo-Saxon pity into his wounds. "A cripple is fit only to wipe the children's noses and break the household pots."

Of course one feeds and clothes a helpless unfortunate in order not only to gain merit with the goddess of mercy at the time of the Feast of Universal Rescue, but also to help the departed spirits of one's ancestors. For these may have been inferior in caste to those of the man to whom one gives alms, and thus, by the posthumous act of largesse, become the latter ancestors' equals in the gray, whirling world of ghosts.

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17. *joss house*, Chinese temple or house for idols.



Yes, one gained face by giving; but what particular face-gaining was there in a kindly word, in sympathy?

"A word," said Yung Long, the wholesale grocer, "is a breath of wind. A word is dirt. A word is an infidel act. The deed is the thing, food is the witness, and a full stomach the divine arbiter."

Pell Street would have been well pleased had Cobbler's Wax done the decent thing and committed suicide. They even told him so in a roundabout manner, and one Friday when the cripple was burning Hung Shu joss-sticks in front of Sakya Muni Buddha,<sup>18</sup> Yu Ch'ang, the priest, mentioned to him casually that the price of coffins was rising. After which delicate preamble, and using the questionable support of ponderous, long-winded quotations from the Book of Threefold Duties,<sup>19</sup> he told him that Pell Street would gladly contribute hundreds of dollars to ship his earthly remains to China and to bury them there, in a large and comfortable red-lacquer coffin, on the side of a hill, facing running water, and with a charming view over the rice-paddies.

"Your spirit will thoroughly enjoy himself," wound up the priest. "Also will your respectable ancestors be made happy, for your funeral shall be a white affair.<sup>20</sup> Fifteen mourners shall be hired and shall have little balls of wool suspended from their hats to represent tears."

But Cobbler's Wax preferred remaining a live cripple to a corpse buried in the state of a mandarin of the second class. He was not a Westerner, given to dissecting his soul and screwing his emotions into test-tubes. Had he been, he would have discovered that it was pride which

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18. *Sakya Muni Buddha*, the founder of Buddhism.

19. *Book of Threefold Duties*, one of the Chinese classics.

20. *white affair*. This means that Cobbler's Wax is promised an impressive funeral. The Chinese mourning color is white.

kept him from joining the spirits of his sires by an act of his own hands—pride, though his body was shrunk and his soul growing wizened and mean as the days swooned into weeks and the weeks into the pitiless swing of years.

Pride—the pride of the gray, brooding centuries, the pride of blood, the pride of name; for Cobbler's Wax was only his nickname. His real name was Tong Fuhsang, a name by right of which he had the reddish, coppery glow beneath his skin; a Manchu<sup>21</sup> name of the stony, contemptuous North, reminiscent of the days when the steel-clad men on horseback swept out of the central Asian plains, conquered the Chinese, who outnumbered them a thousand to one, and imposed on them the *tow-chang*, the pig-tail, in sign of subjection and disgrace. A name which proclaimed him to be a gentleman in his own country, and the others, the men of the clans of Nag and Yung and Yu and Liu, dirt beneath his feet.

He used to say so to them when they bought him *samshu* whisky<sup>22</sup> and tobacco and an occasional opium-pill in the back room of Nag Hong Fah's Great Shanghai Chop-Suey Palace, which was for yellow men only and bore the euphonic appellation, The Honorable Pavilion of Tranquil Longevity. First they would fill his cup, then they would hold a charcoal ball to his bamboo pipe, then they would ask him questions in gently modulated voices:

"Tell us about the honorable Manchus who rule us pigs of Chinamen."

And Cobbler's Wax, knowing that he was speaking the truth, knowing, too, that the others knew it to be the truth, would begin with his father.

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21. *Manchu*. The Manchus, from Manchuria, east of Mongolia and north of Korea, conquered the Chinese in the seventeenth century and have since that time been the rulers of China. Hence, a Manchu is one of high caste.

22. *samshu whisky*, Chinese rice liquor.

"A *chen-shih*<sup>23</sup> he, who received the degree of eminent doctor at the Palace of August and Happy Education, to the west of the Ch'ien Men Gate,<sup>24</sup> in the Forbidden City. A most respectable gentleman who wore the white sheet of repentance and burned the candle of expiation, never shaving his forehead for three hundred days, when the Emperor Tao-kuang<sup>25</sup> ascended the dragon and went to heaven."

"Good! good!" gurgled Nag Hong Fah into his opium-pipe and slapping his knees very much like a tired New York business man at a vaudeville show. "And your esteemed grandfather, tell us about him." Whereupon the cripple would continue, giving the history of his family, from his grandfather, who had been captain-general of the Eighth Banner Corps, to his great-grandfather, who had been Tao-tai<sup>26</sup> of the Imperial Circuit, "an *aisin caoro* he, an imperial clansman, a cousin-in-blood to the Son of Heaven; a *nurhachi*—an iron-capped prince."

At which there was always a general outburst of mirth:

"Ho, Manchu!" "Ho, iron-capped prince!" "Ho, great Buddha!" and hearty slaps on his twisted, hunched spine. A Chinaman, after all, is a democrat who, far from home, enjoys the disgrace of an hereditary aristocrat fully as much as the hyphenated American who has made his pile and can pay for the trick likes dining in a Broadway restaurant and bullying and tipping the pale, yellow-haired, hooknosed waiter who back in the old country had a *von* in front of his name.

Cobbler's Wax understood, but he would answer as he

23. A *chen-shih*, a man who has received the degree of "eminent doctor."

24. *Ch'ien Men Gate*, one of the gates in the walls which surround the *Forbidden City*, a part of the city of Peking in which the Emperor's palace stands. In former days all foreigners were forbidden to enter this part of Peking.

25. *Emperor Tao-kuang*, the father of the Emperor Hsien-feng. Tao-kuang died ("ascended the dragon") in 1850.

26. *Tao-tai*, an intendant of the Circuit Court, a high official of the judiciary.

was bid for two reasons. One was that by refusing to reply he would lose face, since it would make it appear that he was ashamed of his family; the other being that by playing the mountebank, the fool in cap and bells and motley, he was paying for his food and raiment.

It was only when just before the breaking up of the social evening Yung Long would ask his customary final question that the cripple remained silent.

"Why have you left China?" Yung Long would ask, propping his elbow on a hard pillow covered with ancient temple brocade that seemed woven of star-beams and running water. "Why have you, the gentleman, come to the land of the foreign devils, just like me—" complacently—"me, a tailless pig of a Cantonese coolie?"

No answer, though they tried to bribe him with samshu and opium. No answer, though the purplish light in his right eye eddied up in a slow flame, though even the empty left socket quivered with rage.

It was on a day in late August—one of those New York days when the whole city, from the Battery to Yonkers, seems washed over with the lazy gold of the tropics, and the skyscrapers and church spires soar eagerly toward the heaven as if to look for moisture and coolness—that a glimmer of the reason why Cobbler's Wax, the Manchu, had come to America, like any coolie, penetrated into Pell Street. Only a glimmer, quickly dulled by steel and blood and a woman's cry.

The tale of her beauty had been bruited about Pell Street long before her coming. For when Yung Long, twelve months earlier, had decided to "sip vinegar"—this being a Chinese euphemism for taking a second wife—he had furthermore decided, as a sound business man, that it would not do to hide the fact of her beauty in the cloak of decorum.

"Only a rich man can afford two wives," he said to Yu Ch'ang, the priest. "Too, then, it may be that I shall love her."

"She is young?"

"No. Youth to the vaporings of youth. To the wise man of years the carved crystal of knowledge, the polished emerald of satisfaction, the cooling fan of the many accomplishments. The matchmaker in San Francisco, an honest woman with whom I have had dealings before, writes that Si-Si is of most honorable family, that she is a precious casket filled with the arts of coquetry, and that thirty-seven summers have only increased her charms thirty-seven times. She has small feet—what the foreign devils call deformed feet—real golden lilies, each worth a *kang*<sup>27</sup> of tears. It is said that when she washes her hands she scents the water. I wonder what my respected first wife will say." He gave a little shudder. "Her mouth is like a running tap."

"Stop the tap with your fist," advised the priest.

The matchmaker had spoken the truth: Si-Si was indeed beautiful. She was of a dead-white complexion, and her lips, painted a deep crimson, were like a sword wound. Her large, keen, almond-shaped eyes seemed even larger than they were through the curved frame of her immense black eyebrows and the heavy lower lids. The small ears were close to the head. She had the true walk of the woman whose feet have been bound since early infancy, swaying, undulating—"skipping daintily over the tops of golden lilies," as the ancient poet has it.

Side by side with her lord she walked through the greasy, packed wilderness of the Chinatown streets, while he pointed out the sights to her from the elevated structure which rushed past the bottle-like opening of Pell Street with

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27. *kang*, a water-jar.

a great, rumbling, steely sob, to the Chinese Baptist Mission Chapel, which was mantling its face in a veil of drab dust and grime as if grieving at the gaudy, thaumaturgical monstrosities of the joss temple just across the way.

Down the street they strolled, with Yung Long's first wife leaning from the window of her apartment and hurling the full-flavored abuse of Canton at Si-Si:

"O Calamity-on-which-money-is-lost!" she shrilled. "O Ought-to-have-been-a-dog! O illegitimate duck egg! O great and stinking shame!"

The second wife retorted stingingly, effectually choking her rival's recriminations in a hot flood of tears. After which husband and wife proceeded on their stroll, well pleased with themselves, with Pell Street, and the world in general.

They met Cobbler's Wax at the corner of Mott. That which followed cannot be told in honest American newspaper language or in the trained phraseology of American magazines.

A dramatic thing, to be sure; but, paradoxically, the Chinaman is never dramatic in dramatic moments. His drama lies in the slow, proud agony of repression, in smooth words woven close to the loom of lies; also, in unsaid words, then suddenly leaping out in a stony, incontrovertible fact.

"P'i Hsiao" ("Cobbler's Wax"), said the smiling Yung Long, waving a careless, introductory hand at the cripple. "An honorable Manchu who has condescendingly come among us to fill his honorable belly with our refuse. *Lai*" ("Come here"), he added.

The cripple came, his head bowed deep on his chest, his twisted limbs moving clumsily, like those of a maimed spider.

"Cobbler's Wax is not my name," he said in a sort of

meek, querulous whine, for that evening he had partaken too freely of heady number-one opium. "I am a Manchu, a *nurhachi*,<sup>28</sup> an iron-capped prince."

"Oh, yes," drawled Yung Long. "Your real name is—I forgot. Tell us."

"Tong Fu-hsiang," came the answer, matter-of-fact and slow, like the response in an oft-repeated litany; and immediately the harsh Northern name was echoed by Si-Si's crimson lips:

"Tong Fu-hsiang?" with utter incredulity. And as the cripple looked up, a haggard moon ray bringing his wizened, grimacing features into stark relief, she repeated it, "Tong Fu-hsiang!" with fatalistic Mongol certainty.

Cobbler's Wax stared at her. He studied her from the elaborate seed-pearl head-dress to the tips of her tiny, embroidered slippers.

"Yes," he said, "I am Tong Fu-hsiang. And it seems that I cannot escape you, Crusher of Hearts!" And, speaking in a voice as even and passionless as Fate: "Look at me! Look at me well! Am I not a handsome lover? Am I not comely and strong and sweetly scented? *Ahi*, Crusher of Hearts, look at me!"

She did not utter a syllable. Something like a wave of immense, breath-clogging sensations leaped up in her eyes, issuing from the past, returning to the present, trying to blend both past and present, and shuddering in the hopeless chill of the task. Shadowy, it seemed, and gentle and cruel and very unhuman; and, forgetting the world about her, forgetting her husband, forgetting the reek and riot of Pell Street, she stretched out her hands.

"I—I waited, waited, waited," she stammered finally.

"You lie!" came the cripple's low retort. "I was poor and a gentleman, a scholar. And the other was rich—rich with riches dishonestly earned, and you——"

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28. *nurhachi*, in apposition with *Manchu* (see note 21, page 209).



"No! no!" There was anguish in her words, but her eyes were scanning Cobbler's Wax's face intently as though, straight through the anguish in her own soul, she was watchful of the effect on him, a woman to the last. "That day when you wrote me—when I came to meet you in the Street of the Ten Thousand Refreshing Breezes—I waited until——"

"Be quiet, Leaky-Tongue!" came the cripple's curt command. He spoke with a strange dignity, and Si-Si kowtowed and obeyed.

It was very odd, this scene in Pell Street—the woman in her gaudy bridal finery kowtowing, not before the cripple, but, as it were, before somebody who had died, an invisible personality, an inseparable partner of her and his past, whatever it had been, and silent, slightly trembling.

And then the silence was splintered by Yung Long's voice:

"Speak, Si-Si!" He laughed. "For many moons have we chased the slippery tail of Cobbler's Wax's mystery. Speak, Si-Si!"

Yung Long had understood at once. Si-Si and Cobbler's Wax had been lovers. But what of it?

"Speak, Si-Si!" he insisted as the woman did not reply. "Give me the great and terrible secret why this Pekinese scholar and gentleman has trodden the thorny path of labor, why he has come to the land for the foreign barbarians, like any coolie. Tell me the gorgeous jest!"

It was never known if the woman intended to obey her lord or if, still unaware of his presence, of his very words, she was trying to reach to the heart of the broken cripple whom, to her feminine heart, woe and loneliness and suffering had made desirable once more.

"Tong Fu-hsiang," she said, "I am speaking the truth. Together with Chi-li, my old nurse, I waited, as becomes

a woman. Then, when you did not come, when your honorable mother told me that—when she cursed me on the street, giving me black names, calling me a shameless one——”

Cobbler's Wax cut off her words with a gesture. It was more than a mere gesture. It seemed like a dramatic shadow falling swift and pitiless.

“The tale is ended,” he said. “Perhaps you speak the truth, perhaps you do not. It is easier to measure the depth of the ocean with a jackal's tail than to probe the heart of woman. One thing only is certain: I am—Cobbler's Wax, and you are Si-Si—and the bride of Yung Long.”

Yung Long, looking from the cripple to Si-Si, picked up the words and tossed them to the lowering, murky Pell Street sky with an avalanche of gurgling laughter:

“The bride of Yung Long! The bride of the grocer, the Cantonese coolie, the pig! *Ahi*, my bride!” He drew her to him with a sweep of his stout arms, and crushed her wedding finery against his breast. “My bride!” he repeated triumphantly, “and once she was the bride of a Manchu, a *nurhachi*, an iron-capped prince! Is that the great secret, hunchback?”

Cobbler's Wax had already turned to go, but he stopped. He looked at Yung Long for five long seconds. A smile curled his thin lips.

He stood very still. His neck was twisted, his limbs palsied. Yet something seemed to grow within his soul, softly to infold him, casing his outer being with shining, glittering glory, with a crowding, terrible sense of strength and pride. It seemed that the strength, the pride, whatever it was and however it had come, was moving to and fro within the maimed, shattered walls of his body,

working subtly, steadily, mysteriously, to bring about a transformation of the man.

He lifted his left hand with a gesture that was prophetic and colossal. His seeing eye flamed with something eternal, racially eternal, racially vital and indestructible.

"You are right," he said. "Once she was my bride, the bride of a gentleman. Then she met a low-caste, a man even like yourself, rich, filling his belly with greasy food and his dull brain with unclean thoughts. I killed that man and I had to flee. Thus, by the inexorable swing of fate, I came here. I became what you see me, a cripple, maimed, helpless——"

"And living on our alms," laughingly interposed the grocer.

"Indeed." Cobbler's Wax gravely inclined his head. "But—I am still a *nurhachi*, still——"

"A lover?" came the mocking query.

"Perhaps," said the other, and he turned his eyes away from the grocer and looked at the woman, who was staring at him wide-eyed, as if seeing the specters of the past. In his look there was groping after eternal, tremendously important secrets and a boundless, challenging assurance; furthermore love—love which was both sweet and harsh, love somber like the dawn winds of a thousand forgotten sunrises.

"Si-Si," he said in a great, clear voice, "can it be that you have forgotten the days that are past, when I made a carpet of my heart for your little golden feet, when your soul was a stainless mirror in which I saw my own, when your heart was the well of my love, and my heart the stone of your contentment? My life is but a blackened crucible, but my love for you, Crusher of Hearts, is the golden bead at the bottom of the crucible."

He stepped close up to her, disregarding Yung Long, who was torn between fury and laughter and amazement.

"Crusher of Hearts," he went on, and it was not the cripple speaking, the outcast of Pell Street, the taker of alms, the butt of rough coolie wit, but a Manchu, a scholar, a poet, "I love you. To have you again I would curse the memory of my honorable ancestors and spit on the name of the blessed Lord Buddha. For I love you, Si-Si. Can it be that you have forgotten?"

It is difficult to tell afterward with accuracy the many minute details which make up a comedy or a tragedy of life; but though it all happened in a few moments, the picture of it projected itself on Yung Long's mind with the fidelity of a single, unforgettable fact.

He felt Si-Si squirm and turn in his arms. He felt her bracing her arms against his chest and tearing herself away. He saw the cripple gather her to him.

"I have not forgotten, Tong Fu-hsiang!" she murmured. "I have not forgotten, Beloved!"

"And I, too," came the cripple's sibilant reply—"I, too, have not forgotten. I have not forgotten that once you lied to me, that you gave up my love for the love of riches. I have not forgotten, Crusher of Hearts, that I am a cripple who cannot earn his own bread or that of the woman he loves, he still loves. I have not forgotten the pride of race and——" Suddenly he turned to Yung Long, who stood like a statue. "Take ye another woman unto yourself, Grocer! This you cannot have!"

With utter swiftness his palsied right hand shot beneath his dirty shirt. It came out with a glitter and crackle of steel that found her heart, and she fell backward with a low cry at the feet of her lover, her blood trickling slowly, dyeing the green and rose of her silken bridal finery with splotches of rich crimson.

The next moment, even as Yung Long jumped forward with a hoarse cry of rage, the point of the cripple's knife gleamed again in the yellowish half-light like a crescent of evil passions.

"Love is a flower," he said. "When it is withered it is hay, and the oxen eat it." He struck his own heart with a straight, downward blow of the dagger.

He fell across Si-Si's body.

Cobbler's Wax lay there dead, with arms outstretched, as if to protect his dead love against Yung Long, against the reel and riot and cruelty of Pell Street.

### NOTES AND QUESTIONS

"Cobbler's Wax" was first published in *The Century Magazine*, July, 1918.

1. Following the tremendous popularity of Thomas Burke's gruesome stories of Chinese life in London, *Limehouse Nights*, (1916) and *More Limehouse Nights* (1921), American short-story writers have recently made much use of the Chinaman in our country as story material. The growing interest in the problem of race in our national life also stimulated the production of alien character stories. Through his unusualness the Chinaman does not require a great deal of individuality in character portrayal to mark himself off from the rest of us. By his very name he is a man apart. The atmosphere of this type of story readily suggests itself. The conflict, also, is obvious. The Chinaman brings from his home a civilization which is in direct contrast with what he finds among us.

2. The situation in "Cobbler's Wax" began in China long before the story opens, and though it reaches its decisive moment on a bit of foreign territory in New York City, the Chinese point of view is never lost sight of. Throughout the story, China, thousands of miles away, is the background. The Chinaman brings China with him and remains a Chinaman, a stranger within our gates.

3. The story is full of dramatic action, which is almost always sure to arrest the attention of the reader and to startle him into

an interest in following the events. The author, furthermore, takes pains to arouse your sympathy for Cobbler's Wax by insisting upon his homesickness, his loneliness, his loss of social position, and his maimed physical condition.

4. Why was it difficult for Cobbler's Wax to enter America? Why does the author pay as much attention as he does to impressing you with the great effort Cobbler's Wax made to get into our country? What was the basis of Cobbler's Wax's feeling of superiority over the other Chinese? Why are Chinese words scattered through the story?

5. How is the Chinaman's nature made to appear different from the Westerner's? On page 213 the author writes: "The Chinaman is never dramatic in dramatic moments." Does this racial quality appear in the murder scene? At what point is the end of the story first prophesied? On page 208 the author says: "[Cobbler's Wax] was not a Westerner, given to dissecting his soul and screwing his emotion into test-tubes." Remember this characterization of the Western mind when you read "The Nature of an Oath" and "All or Nothing."

*Suggested Reading.*—"A Simple Act of Piety" and "The Hatchetman" by Achmed Abdullah (in *The Honorable Gentleman*); "Widows and Orphans" by Ellen La Motte (in *Civilization*); "An Instrument of God" by Lincoln Colcord (O'Brien, 1921); *Jade* by Hugh Wiley.

*Biographical Note.*—Achmed Abdullah's full name and titles are Syved Shaykh Achmed Abdullah Nadier Khan el-Iddvisseyieh el-Durani. He was born in Afghanistan in 1891; served in the British-Indian army and with the Turkish army during the first Balkan war; studied law and philology at Cairo, Oxford, and Paris. For several years he has lived in New York City and has contributed to many American magazines.

## NOT WISELY BUT TOO WELL\*

OCTAVUS ROY COHEN

"Remember, Gussie, I want the dining-room thorough-cleaned. The Browning Club meets here this afternoon and——"

"Yassum, Mis' C'ruthers, it'll be so clean you ain't gwine know it."

"And that flat silver must be polished."

"I'se gwine 'tend to all of that. You trot 'long downtown, Mis' C'ruthers, and leave it to me."

Mrs. Franklin Carruthers heaved a sigh of ineffable contentment. "You are a very valuable servant, Gussie. Goodby."

"G'-by, Mis' C'ruthers. Be sho' an' have a good time."

The front door of the apartment slammed. Miss Gussie Muck, colored maid-of-most-of-the-work, mopped the polished floor of the dining-room viciously for perhaps two minutes—until the thrum of Mrs. Carruthers' automobile came to her ears—then gently turned back the corner of the Axminster art square. When she replaced the corner the dust had disappeared. Then Gussie leaned her mop against the door, strolled into Mrs. Carruthers' bedroom and seated herself at the dressing-table.

A coating of talcum, a touch of face powder, a dab of rouge—and Gussie was well satisfied that she had enhanced the physical glories of feature with which she had been endowed by nature. She made her way to the living-room,

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selected a lurid novel from the bookcase, and dropped languidly into an easy chair, after having first helped herself to a quarter of particularly toothsome glacé fruits from the box on the library table.

She was interrupted by the strident ringing of the kitchen bell. Her face expressed complete disapproval of the interruption. But at sight of the man standing on the tiny back porch, the expression underwent a decided change.

Aaron Segar was not unused to the phenomenon. Aaron had been born with a gift for making women smile and grow warm all over. He was handsome and tall and broad and divinely chocolate-creamy of skin. He unleashed his most fetching laugh for Gussie.

"Howdye, Miss Muck."

"Mawnin', Mistuh Segar."

"Wukin' hahd?"

Gussie sighed. "Reckon I is. Ain't nobody livin' these days what ain't wuk hahd, Misto' Segar."

"You shuah said sumpin' then, Miss Gussie. Wuk, wuk, wuk all the time. Me more'n you."

"Huh!"

"That's the truth. Ain't no gittin' off fo' me. Bein' janitor is a pow'ful hahd perfession, Miss Gussie."

"Reckon you is strong enough to stan' it, Mistuh Segar."

"Reckon I is. But it's pow'ful ti'esome an' lonely, Gussie. It been diffe'ent down to S'vannah what I come fum. They ain't 'spec a man to do no th'ee men's wuk down they."

"You was a 'bahtment-house janitor there same as heah?"

"Uh-huh!" He lowered his voice discreetly. "Ain't I saw Mis' C'ruthers go off in her car jes' now?"

"Yeh."

He opened the screen door. "Don't mind if'n I drap in, does you?"

"He'p yo'se'f, Mistuh Segar."

He waved his hand grandiosely. "You'ne me is gwine be good frien's, ain't we, Gussie?"

"Guess you c'n answer that well as me."

"Then call me 'Aaron.'"

"Ain't knowed you but th'ee days."

"You gwine know me longer'n that. Boun' to."

"Well . . ."

"All the gals what I likes, I asks them to call me Aaron. I nev' was no shakes fo' fo'mal'ty. Fust names atween frien's, I says. Tha's how come I to call you Gussie. You ain't got no 'jections, is you?"

"This town ain't S'vannah, Mistuh Segar."

He rose. "If'n you ain't gwine call me Aaron——"

"Aaron!"

He reseated himself. "Tha's better. No—this heah town ain't like S'vannah, Gussie. Up heah, they ain't no tellin' who's quaility folks an' who ain't—that is, 'mongst the white folks. An' I'se always been pow'ful p'tic'lar 'bout what soht of white folks I wuks fo'."

"I ain't blamin' you, Aaron. Us colored people cain't be too 'ticalar. How you like it up heah?"

"Tol'able. On'y tol'able."

"How come?"

"I'se lonely, Gussie. Ain't know nobody in this heah town. On'y a few. Come night, they ain't nothin' fo' me to do but go down to the 'pahment what they gives me in the basement an' set 'roun' an' wisht I was married so's I woul'n't be so lonely."

"Huh! Bet you been married!"

Aaron Segar laughed heartily. "Is I look it?"

"We-ell, not 'zactly."

"An' they's a reason, Gussie. 'I ain't nev' met the gal I wan'ed to marry. Not twell yet."

"Reckon you is might' hahd to please, Mistuh Segar."

"Aaron!"

"Aaron."

"Reckon I is hahd to please. Tha's how come I to watch ontill Mis' C'ruthers' gone off in her car, an' then come up heah."

"How that?"

"I ain't make much talk with you, Gussie—but you shuah looks pow'ful good to me."

"G'wan, Aaron. You is some loose flatt'rer."

"Reckon I is got the cou'age of my convictions."

"Reckon you think I is like them S'vannah gals—swally all that bull."

"Gals whut I went with heahtof' ain't got so many compliments fum me."

"How I know that?"

"B'lieve it or not. I cain't *make* you."

"Well . . . Hongry?"

"Always, 'ceptin' when I c'n git to town. Does my own cookin' downstairs, Gussie. Man's got to, come he ain't got no wife. So I ain't git ve'y good food. Why you ask me?"

"They was a couple chops lef' over fum breakfas' . . ."

"You cook 'em?"

"Uh-huh!"

"Trot 'em out. Bet they is some fine-cooked chops."

Gussie spurred herself to real activity for some five minutes whilst she basked in the light of Aaron Segar's unqualified approval. She heated two succulent lamb chops, made three slices of crisp toast which she buttered liberally, and poured the solid cream top from the quart of fresh milk. And Aaron exhibited his appreciation by a marvelous

display of gustatory gymnastics. Finally he finished, sighed, and regretfully shoved his plate aside.

"Golly! you shuah is some cook!"

"Reckon I is got to be if'n I hol' my job with Mis' C'ruthers. White folks is awful capshus, Aaron. They spec' they colored he'p to wuk all the time."

"Ain't you talkin' now?"

"Sometimes I is got a pow'ful good notion to cut loose an' git married."

Aaron delayed his departure with one hand on the door. All the wealth of a contagiously sunny nature went into the smile which he bestowed upon her. "When you makes up yo' mind to git married, Gussie, don't fohgit my telephone number cas'n you have any trouble findin' a husband."

As he stomped down the steps leading to the decorative back court of the Glen Ridge apartments, Gussie dropped into a kitchen chair and stared raptly into space. Aaron Segar! What a man! Of their own volition her thoughts veered dreamily to the little apartment which the proprietors of the Glen Ridge apartments furnished their janitor. Bedroom, dining-room, kitchen—gas, steam heat, hot and cold water. . . . Gussie sighed.

Meanwhile the magnificent Aaron paused at the back door of Mrs. Percival Connor's apartment. His hypercritical eyes rested with infinite appreciation on the trim little figure of one Mallissie Cheese, cook and nurse girl in the Connor menage.

"Mawnin', M'lissie."

The girl shrugged with simulated indifference: "Mawnin'."

"What's the matter; somebody been rub you the wrong way?"

"No."

"You seem 'bout as happy as a live pig at a barbecue."

"Reckon I is happy, Mistuh Segar."

"Mis' Connor been givin' you down-the-country?"

"Reckon they ain't no white folks try no sech fumma-diddles on me, Mistuh Segar."

"How come you to fohgit my name Aaron?"

"Reckon I fohgits so Gussie Muck up to Mis' C'ruthers' c'n remember it."

Aaron threw back his head and gave vent to a hearty laugh. "Shucks! You ain't gwine git jealous of a ol' frump like Gussie Muck, is you?"

Mallissie looked up. More—she smiled. "Gussie Muck is a pow'ful pretty gal, Aaron."

He shook his head in diplomatic negation. "Reckon you an' me is got diffe'ent tastes, Mallissie. I like 'em li'l—like what you is."

When Aaron departed from the Connor kitchen about five minutes later he left Mallissie Cheese humming happily and dated-up to accompany him to Champion Moving Picture Theatre No. 2 that night to see the nineteenth episode of "The Fighting Fate," which they agreed upon as the high-water mark in motion picture production.

The new janitor reached the back court—and he met Fashion Wilson, a girl of the Gussie Muck type—only a trifle more so. She was seated on a bench under the big oak giving half an eye to the care of two children and the other one and a half to Aaron.

"Been paintin' Mis' Connor's kitchen, Aaron?"

"Naw."

"How come you in they so long?"

"Been tryin' to git down heah an' talk with you, Fashi'n, but that skinny li'l gal what wuks fo' Mis' Connor—whut her name is?"

"Mallissie Cheese."

"That's it—I plumb fo'got. It jes' seemed like she

woul'n't lemme git away. Jes settin' they an' makin' a whole passel of foolish talk . . ."

"Mallissie's a might' nice gal."

"Guess they is some things you'n me won't nev' agree on, Fashi'n."

"An' pretty——"

"I likes mo' of them than what they is of M'lissie." He cast the eye of a connoisseur over Fashion's Junoesque<sup>1</sup> proportions. Then he eased himself to the bench beside her. "How 'bout goin' down to Champeen Number Two with me tomorry night, huh?"

"Whyn't you ask Ella?"

"Ella which?"

"Ella Dungee."

"That funny-lookin' gal whut wuks fo' Mis' Hammond? Whut fo' I should ask her?"

"You is been hangin' 'roun' that 'partment right smaht lately."

"Huh! Reckon I is *had* to. Way that gal keeps Mis' Hammond's kitchen, Fashi'n—if'n I di'n't git that they place cleaned out they'd be roaches all over this heah 'pahtment in a week. Guess Ella Dungee ain't Aaron Segar's style a tall, a tall."

But twenty minutes later when he met Ella Dungee after having conducted a strategic retirement from the immediate presence of the buxom Fashion, he gave her a heart-warming smile. "'Clare to goodness, Ella—if'n you ain't the ve'y purties' gal I ev' did see!"

"Bet you is said that th'ee hund'ed times today, Aaron."

"Cain't be. Ain't seed you but this oncet."

"Nothin' pretty 'bout me."

"I gwine buy you a lookin' glass, Ella. By the way; got a date fo' Sat'dy night?"

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1. *Junoesque*, like Juno, the tall and stately queen of the gods.

"No-o."

"How 'bout gwine to Champeen Number Two with me?"

"Well . . ."

He waved cheerily as he descended to his basement. "Man sho' is lucky when he c'n date up with a gal like you, Ella."

"You is a sof' talker, Aaron."

"Me? Shucks! I woul'n't know how to pay a compliment if'n I wan'ed to!"

It really wasn't Aaron's fault. He had been created with a talent for women and was no believer in burying any talent. Women gravitated toward him. They clung to him. They pestered an otherwise equable existence.

His obliging nature was the petard upon which he was hoist. He hated to disappoint anybody—especially a lady friend. And he was frankly flattered by their unanimous and unconcealed adoration.

And these girls were different from his Savannah friends, just as the Glen Ridge apartments were better than the unpretentious things he had janitored on Savannah's Avercorn Street. These girls had more *élan*,<sup>2</sup> their ideas were metropolitan. They were women of fine discrimination and delicate appreciation—as different from the crude, provincial product of Tybee and Thunderbolt<sup>3</sup> as high yaller is different from ebony.

More—standing in with the cooks was a material proposition. His own culinary labor and expenses were reduced. Aaron was an epicure and appreciated the fact that the Gray, Connor, Hammond, and Carruthers families lived upon the fat of the land. The *lagniappe*<sup>4</sup> from their

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2. *élan*, literally, ardor, dash; colloquially, spirit, "go."

3. *Tybee and Thunderbolt*, small towns at the mouth of the Savannah River in Georgia, not far from the city of Savannah.

4. *lagniappe*, a Louisiana-French term—a present given by merchants as a bonus on goods bought of them.



pantries tickled his palate and brightened his philosophy. He liked the city and the city liked him. Within two months he had become somewhat of a social lion. He was initiated into the exclusive Sons & Daughters of I Will Arise; he joined the ten-cents a week Over the River Burying Society and became a prominent and valued mourner at the obsequies of the dear departed brothers and sisters who were ushered from this mortal coil with full panoply of parade—and music. He sang a pleasing baritone and joined the choir of the Primitive Baptist Church—much to the delight of the Rev'end Arlandas Sipsey, pastor thereof. Reverends Plato Tubb and Wesley Luther Thigpen of the First African M. E. and the Shiloh congregations, respectively, admitted that the Reverend Arlandas had outgeneraled them. Aaron Segar was an acquisition of which any church might well be proud.

He was decidedly a man of parts. His salary of eighty-five dollars a month was exclusive of perquisites such as a steam-heated, furnished apartment at the Glen Ridge and estovers<sup>5</sup> provided by the admiring cooks over whom his spell had been cast.

But the swift flight of time brought a wrinkle to the normally placid forehead of Aaron Segar. He found himself facing a near-domestic problem to which there was no apparent answer, and he besought the professional services of Lawyer Evans Chew, leading light of darktown's legal fraternity.

The buxom stenographer warmed to Aaron's sweetest smile and carried his name into the private sanctum of Lawyer Chew. She returned promptly.

"Lawyer Chew will see you in a minute, Mistuh Segar. He's in confe'ence now."

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<sup>5</sup> *estovers*, literally, necessities or supplies allowed by law as alimony or as a widow's allowance; here, gifts.

Aaron waited patiently, amusing himself by flirting violently with the stenographer, whose hitherto impregnable heart pounded with wild hope. Finally the pompous conferees departed and Lawyer Chew—slender, immaculate, horn-rim spectacled—personally ushered Aaron into the private office.

“Mister Segar—I am delighted to meet you.”

“Me, too, Lawyer Chew.”

“You wish to consult me on a professional matter?”

“Yassuh—tha’s it ’zactly, Lawyer Chew.”

“Ahem. . . Proceed, please.”

“Yassuh——” Aaron groped blindly, then smiled wanly.

“I ain’t ’zactly know whar to begin at.”

“What sort of a case is it?”

“Dunno—less’n you’d call it britch of promise.”

“A-ha! You have become involved with *lay pateet femme*,<sup>6</sup> as they say in French.”

“How that?”

“You are involved with a member of the—er—gentler sex.”

“Yassuh! Involved is right—sho’ nuff.”

“How did it occur?”

“It ain’t occur, Lawyer Chew—it jes’ happen.”

“What is the lady’s name?”

“Tain’t no lady.”

“What?”

“Nossuh; it’s fo’ wimmin.”

“Four?”

“Tha’s it: one, two, th’ee, fo’.”

Lawyer Chew leaned forward incredulously. “Do you mean to tell me, Brother Segar, that you are faced by four britch of promise suits?”

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6. *lay pateet femme*, Lawyer Chew’s pronunciation of the French *les petites femmes*, the ladies.

"I c'n cut it down to th'ee, if'n that'll help any."

"How so?"

"Marry one of them wimmin an' let the other th'ee scratch."

"Ahem! Strawdinry! A case prob'ly without parallel on the books. How does it happen that you have fallen into the error——"

"'Twarn't no error, Lawyer Chew—'twarn't nothin' but a mistake."

"I suppose it was. Who are the ladies in question?"

"They's M'lissie Cheese an' Ella Dungee an' Fashi'n Wilson an' Gussie Muck. They wuks out to the Glen Ridge 'pahtments whar I is janitor at. An'," his eyes twinkled irrepressibly, "they is mighty lovin'."

"I see; I see. Continue, please."

"I'se tellin' you this right heah an' now, Lawyer Chew—they ain't hahdly no man c'n handle one woman. But fo' wimmin, Lawyer Chew, is an impossibility. I *knows*!"

"You are sure that they will all sue you?"

"I ain't know as any of them is because I sort of got 'em guessin'. But a woman ain't got but so much guessin' in her, Lawyer Chew—an' when that gits used up, she wants action. Y'see, right now they ain't nary one of them gals knows which one I is gwine pick out. They is jes' 'bout tearin' one-nuther's ha'r out by the roots—but they's all kinder skeered to light in on me 'cause they's the chanest that they is the lucky one.

"I been playin' both ends 'gainst the middle, Lawyer Chew—an' the middle is might' nigh reached. I ain't know whether I is comin' or goin'. Meanw'ile they is all tryin' to find out whar I stan' at."

"What have you told them?"

"I done swore to each of them gals she is the one I gwine marry. An' they is gittin' pow'ful impatient. I sort

of wan'ed to fin' out what is the law on britches of promise—not jes' one britch, but a whole lot of 'em."

Lawyer Chew cleared his throat and thumbed portentously through the Alabama code. He next consulted his Southern Reporter and his Cyc.<sup>7</sup> He shook his head discouragingly. "The dictas ain't ve'y clear about yo' sort of a case, Brother Segar. Seems like the men what wrote the law books never entertained no idea of a man gettin' engaged to four women at one time."

"Oh! Golly. . . . You mean to set they an' tell me, Lawyer Chew, that they ain't nothin' in all them books gwine show me how to git out of the pickle I'se in?"

"No," reflectively. "I don't see——"

"Not no way?"

Lawyer Chew brightened with an idea. "If you were married to all four of them women, Brother Segar, I might help you, because the law is ve'y specific about bigamy."

"Huh! If'n I was married to them fo' wimmin, Lawyer Chew—they ain't *no* law could he'p me."

"I still don't understand how you got into this mess."

"I di'n't git in. Hones', I di'n't. I was jes' sort of pulled in like a feller listenin' at the bones<sup>8</sup> click. Reckon you ain't nev' had the 'sperience of wimmin fallin' in love with you in job-lots, is you?"

"Not—er—precisely."

"Tha's the trouble with you lawyers. You ain't had no 'sperience. All what you know is what has been wrote in them they books. What you reckon them they men knowed 'bout M'lissie Cheese an' Ella Dungee an' them other nigger gals? Huh? What you reckon they knowed 'bout them? White folks wrote them books an' white folks don' know nothin' 'bout how a yaller gal c'n co't a man if'n he

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7. *Cyc*, Cyclopædia of Law and Procedure.

8. *bones*, dice.

looks good to her. Ain't that so, Lawyer Chew—ain't it the truth, now?"

"And you have personally pledged yourself to each of the four girls?"

"Absotively an' ontirely. They woul'n't stan' fo' nothin' less."

The attorney and counselor rubbed the palms of his hands unctuously. "As they isn't any statute or decision of a co't of las' resort covering the case under consideration," he proclaimed sententiously, "the best I can do is to consider the circumstances from the light of expedi-umcy."

"Tha's it, Lawyer Chew—you sho' is tootin' now."

"In that light, the best advice I can give you, Brother Segar, is that you bring about a quarrel with each of the girls to which you is engaged and make them break off the engagement."

Aaron Segar rose abruptly. His face was wreathed in disgust. "Huh! Reckon you ain't no diffe'ent fum them foolish books, Lawyer Chew. Maybe you know the law—but you ain't know them gals!"

Mr. Segar left the office of Lawyer Chew more perturbed than he had ever been in his placid, happy-go-lucky life. He even forgot to flirt with the stenographer. For once he was up against a proposition from which his cheerful smile and sunny disposition could not extricate him—a dilemma, in fact, where they were arrayed with the liabilities instead of with the assets.

"I reckon," he soliloquized miserably, "they ain't no nigger could ever git in no worse scrape than what I is in."

In which he was wrong. There was one darky capable of getting in deeper. There was one dusky gentleman who promptly proceeded to do it.

The name of that negro was—Aaron Segar!

For—two nights after his interview with Lawyer Evans Chew—Aaron Segar met his affinity!

The epochal event occurred at Blue Lake Park, the negro amusement grounds some six miles from the heart of the big southern city in which Glen Ridge apartments and Aaron's amoral troubles were located.

The time was night, the occasion a gala jubilee of the society season: The Eleventh Annual Barbecue and Picnic of the Primitive Baptist Church. Tickets, including Gent and Lady—Fifty Cents. Children, half price. Come one—come all. Rev. Arlandas Sipsey, Pastor.

It was a noble revelry: a glory of fires burning in shallow ditches—fires which reached the succulent pork quarters sizzling as they revolved on the iron skewers; fires which kept hot the iron vessels filled with luscious brown gravy. Barbecue specialists hovered over the gravy vessels, armed with long mops and small tree branches. These they soaked in the gravy and then spattered over the roasting meat. The ample Sally Crouch presided near by in queenly fashion over the Brunswick Stew division—without which no barbecue is complete.

The double quartet from the Primitive Baptist Church choir was harmoniously on hand, and between songs the string and reed orchestra of Professor Alec Champagne rendered toe-tickling melodies, which ranged from the classic Memphis Blues to an elegantly syncopated version of the *Miserère*<sup>9</sup> which Professor Champagne claimed as an original composition. Children romped and shouted and got in everyone's way. Church deacons clustered in groups, grim-visaged and ponderous whilst they "argyified" about the heat of the hereafter and the spiritual benefits of total immersion.

Young couples took shape from the darkness. The other

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9. *Miserère*, a famous duet from Verdi's opera *Il Trovatore*.

congregations were plentifully represented: Rev'end Plato Tubb was there and so was the Reverend Wesley Luther Thigpen. Then, too, there was Dr. Vivian Simmonds, M. D.; and Amos Stump, the perpetually smiling undertaker; and Florian Slappey and Mr. and Mrs. Simeon Broughton, and Pliny Driver with his gaily-plumaged fiancée, Charity Chism; and Peter and Mrs. Sampson, and Elias Rush and his wife—néé Imogene Carter; and Imogene's brother, Clarence; and Pinetop Roller and ponderous Mrs. Ella Hawkins and Sister Callie Flukers and the dynamic Crispus Breach, fiery-penned editor of *The Weekly Epoch*—Crispus glaring intensively into the black void for new adjectives with which to embellish his account of this social triumph.

And there, too, was Ione Drought!

Aaron Segar, harassed—overwrought and harried with the nerve-strain of placating each of his four fiancées and compromising himself with no one of them—Aaron Segar saw Ione Drought!

Aaron fell.

Gone on the instant were his fervent resolutions to eschew women. Gone was the misogyny inspired by the utter failure of his most fervid attempts to unleash himself from four pairs of ardent, clinging, feminine arms. Gone forever was the solemn pledge of celibacy.

He forgot Mallissie Cheese. He forgot Fashion Wilson. He forgot Ella Dungee and Gussie Muck. He forgot everything and everybody save Ione Drought; Ione the magnificent, Ione the unique, Ione the reserved, Ione the neglected, Ione the desirable.

"Who—who—that gal?" he inquired of Florian Slappey, mentor of the younger social set.

"Which gal?"

"Over yonder—that they gal with the green dress an' the yaller hat?"



Florian raised languid, bored eyes. "Oh! her? She ain't nobody but Ione Drought."

Aaron glared—but retained his tact. "Perduce me to her, will you?"

"Shuah! Anythin' to 'blige a frien'."

Ten minutes later the enslaved Aaron and a happiness-dazed Ione dislimned into the shadows of Blue Lake Park. Four pair of affianced eyes searched in vain for Aaron Segar. He had disappeared, and for one glorious hour he forgot that love of women had been his undoing—forgot everything save that he tightly clasped the warm, responsive hand of the woman who had been preordained as his.

Aaron Segar had fallen utterly, blindly, hopelessly, miserably in love!

Better men than Aaron Segar have fallen in love, but none more deeply. He told Ione all about it so often that he repeated himself. Finally he gave up in disgust and verbal attempts—declaring himself no orator—and took to verse:

Ione your eys burn up my heart like fier

and wen I say that I shure ant no lier

I'm fond of you so passinate and true

I only wish you coud love me strong like I love you.

yrs respectfully,

AARON SEGAR.

Ione capitulated before the poetic shafts. Aaron wasn't any Robert Browning, but he, at least, was understandable.<sup>10</sup> And from the outset Ione had been considerably dazed by Aaron's sudden passion and had been wary and skeptical. But a week proved to her beyond peradventure of doubt that his intentions were as honorable as they were obvious, and thereupon she brought into action the great fund of common sense with which she was endowed.

She gave in—with reserve. She let Aaron understand

<sup>10.</sup> *understandable*, a reference to the difficult style of the English poet, Robert Browning (1812-1889).

that he was being considered—seriously considered; that he might, in fact, presume to claim the perquisites of an engaged man. But she succeeded admirably in holding the deliriously happy man at sufficient distance to keep him in constant terror of losing her.

Ione was a new type to him. She was a girl whom the white folks instinctively and universally liked. She was quiet and not at all inclined to flamboyancy. The colored folks kowtowed to her poise and ungrudgingly made a place for her on the topmost social stratum. She had never been deluged with masculine matrimonial attentions, and it was her frank disbelief in her own colossal luck which kept her head on her shoulders until she had Aaron hooked and landed high and dry—wiggling.

During the first week of his cyclonic courtship Aaron Segar struggled heroically to keep from her ears any morsel of gossip pertaining to his relations with the four amorous kitchen empresses at the Glen Ridge apartments. And then—because there was something about her that—Oh! well, you know, a feller jes' cain't help talkin'—he himself told her!

She listened attentively and with his final abjectly despairing words disengaged the hand he had been clutching.

"Now, honey . . ." he pleaded.

"How I to know I ain' jes' the fif', Aaron?"

"You is the fust."

"Bein' engag' is a kind of a habit what you is got, ain't it?"

"'Tis now, sweetness. Befo', 'twas jes' a accident."

"Nev' heard of fo' things happenin' jes' so accidental."

"Did with me, hon! Them they wimmin jes' woul'n't lemme 'lone."

"Huh! They sho' Lawd must've been hahd up fo' a man."

"Tha's right, sweetness; that shuah is right. They must of been pow'ful hahd up fo' a man."

The completeness of his abnegation curbed her sarcasm. She was really sorry for Aaron and genuinely jealous on her own account, for she admitted to herself what she was wise enough to keep from Aaron—she fairly worshiped him and above all else in the world she desired to become Mrs. Aaron Segar. She wanted Aaron, but she wanted him free of encumbrances or prior lien. Furthermore she had no intentions "of 'lowin' no fo' brown hussies to make fuma-diddles with the man what she was 'gage' to." All of which she confided in herself. To Aaron she merely presented a terse ultimatum.

"I ain't gwine live in the Glen Ridge pahtments, Aaron, twell them wimmin is went."

"You sho' ain't!" he echoed with vast sincerity.

"So what you is got to do befo' you make any mo' marriage talk with me is to git them away fum there."

"Huh! Whyn't you tell me to do sumpin' easy like to buy a limmysine or sumthin'?"

"Guess if'n you was much anxious to marry me, Aaron, you'd git rid of them wimmin pretty quick. Once they gits away fum there they ain't gwine bother you no mo'."

"I wants to git rid of them, hon. But how I is gwine do it?"

"Ain't they a old sayin', Aaron, 'bout true love knows how things is done?"

Aaron scratched his head. "Reckon they is, sweetness. An' I sho' is got the truest love. P'raps——" Suddenly he smiled. "If'n I was to git a good idea, Ione, reckon you'd help me out?"

She nodded. "Yep, Aaron, reckon I would."

"Then heah yo' chanest is, honey. Lis'en at what I got to seggest."

She listened.

Ella Dungee descended from Apartment 6 of the Glen Ridge to the back court, where for five minutes she sought Aaron Segar. Failing to discover him she made her disgruntled way to the street. Once she had completely departed, Aaron detached himself from the shadows of the section B stairway and mounted to Apartment 6 where he presented himself, hat in hand, to Mrs. Jacob Hammond.

"Mawnin', Mis' Hammond."

"Good morning, Aaron."

"I brung up some of that roach powder. Beggin' yo' pahdon, Mis' Hammond—" as he cast a critical eye about the kitchen, "—but the tenints is all 'cusin' the roaches of stahlin' heah on 'count—'count——" he paused discreetly.

"On account of what?"

"On 'count Ella don't keep the kitchen so awful clean. Scusin' me sayin' that, Mis' Hammond—'tain't meant fo' no 'flection of you, but——"

"What you say is all true, Aaron. For the past two or three weeks Ella has been a changed girl. I don't understand her at all. I'm not admitting it outside, but she has grown lazy and shiftless and indifferent, and of recent weeks she has kept my kitchen looking like a pigpen."

"Yassum—she do that, sho' nuff, Mis' Hammond. I'se a clean man myse'f an' I loves cleanity, an' I says to myse'f Ella ain't the good cleaner what she useter be. Tha's what troubles all these heah se'vants, Mis' Hammond: they ain't know how to 'preciate a good job with quality folks like what you an' Mistuh Hammond is. Come they to git use' to it an' they c'mences stayin' home or else they gits lazy an' shif'less——"

"And Ella isn't the only one," said Mrs. Hammond wrathfully. "Mrs. Gray's Fashion and Mrs. Connor's Mallissie——"

"Hump!" disdainfully. "M'lissie is got the stayin' home fever, sho' nuff, Mis' Hammond. I kep' a-tellin' her an'

a-tellin' her she di'n't 'preciate a nice place like what she had with Mis' Connor, but shucks! she ain't no dif'ent fum these other new-fangle' colored gals—none of 'em ain't know w'en they is got sumthin' good."

"But what can we do about it?" exclaimed the good lady hopelessly. "We must have servants."

"Tha's so, Mis' Hammond; that shuah is so. Mis' Connor been make that ve'y indentital remark this mawnin' w'en I tell her that M'lissie warn't no mo' sick yestiddy than whut I is now. She say—jes' like what you said: 'I got to have a gal,' she say. Tha's how come I to git her Lily Belle."

"You obtained a new servant for Mrs. Connor?"

"Yassum, on 'count M'lissie was gittin' so wuthless."

Mrs. Hammond wrung her hands. "If you knew of a competent servant, Aaron, why didn't you tell me? If I could only get the right sort of a girl I wouldn't stand Ella another day."

Aaron's face brightened perceptibly. "They's Lily Belle's sister, now——"

"Lily Belle has a sister?"

"Yassum—an' seein' Lily Belle is mebbe gwine wuk fo' Mis' Connor, I been thinkin' Sarah might like to wuk heah. Co'se Sarah's a better gal'n what Lily Belle is——"

"What is she like, Aaron? Tell me all about her—please!"

"Huh! I been knowin' Lily Belle an' Sarah senest they was knee-high to a pair of ducks, Mis' Hammond. They ain't nuthin' tall like the niggers what clutters up these heah kitchens. Ain't nuthin' fancy 'bout 'em an' they ain't got they haid all full up of sassiety. Both them gals is the best cooks whut is: waffles whut melts in yo' mouf an' broilin' steaks so's they's all charred on the youtside an' rare in the middle. An' they's the cleanest gals whut is.

They even keeps they own rooms clean, Mis' Hammond, an' w'en a colored gal keeps her own rooms clean, she is some cleanin' gal, an' tha's the truth. Ain't neither of 'em no flossy dressers, but they's pow'ful neat an' tidy, an'—nuther thing—they gits to wuk *early*!"

"There isn't a day of the past two weeks that Ella has gotten here before twenty minutes to eight."

"Law', Mis' Hammond—Sarah an' Lily Belle ain't know whut 'tis to git to no place of wuk later'n six-thutty. Las' lady Sarah wuk fo' useter tell me that when she'n her husband come out to breakfus' eight o'clock all the house'd be cleaned up an' breakfus' on table an' a fancy salid made fo' lunch. But I'se tellin' you right now, fair an' hones', Mis' Hammond—Sarah ain't gwine wuk fo' no th'ee-fifty a week less't it's gwine be a pummanent place."

Mrs. Jacob Hammond sighed. A nonpareil—a quiet, efficient servant who wanted a *permanent* place! "I—I didn't know there were any servants like that any more, Aaron."

"They ain't, Mis' Hammond—on'y Lily Belle an' Sarah. Reckon you'd like to make talk with Sarah?"

"I certainly would. And you may tell her in advance, Aaron, that if I like her appearance I will start her in at four dollars a week with Sunday afternoon off. When can I see her?"

"I'se gwine bring Lily Belle 'round heah at seven o'clock t'night, Mis' Hammond—so's she c'n make talk with Mis' Connor. I cou'd bring Sarah then."

"Please do."

Aaron grew cautious. "You sho' Ella's gwine be gone by that time? Bein' janitor heah I cain't 'ford to have these heah cooks knowin' I been buttin' in on they business. Woul'n't do it nohow on'y I think so much of you an' Mis-tuh Hammond."

"I understand, Aaron—and I appreciate your interest

tremendously. Here's fifty cents for you. I just simply can't tell you how grateful I am——"

"Tha's all right, Mis' Hammond. Nev' min' 'bout that fo' bits."

"But you must take it."

He fingered the coin affectionately. "No'm—I feel like it'd be an intrusion."

"You really must take that money, Aaron. This servant question is such a problem——"

"Yassum," rejoined Aaron fervently, as he dropped the coin into his pocket, "yo' sho' said sumthin' that time, Mis' Hammond."

He was whistling as he made his way down stairs. He was humming happily at eight-thirty that night as he sat in the street car with Ione Drought en route for Champion Moving Picture Theatre Number 2. And just about that time Mrs. Jacob Hammond dropped informally on Mrs. Percival Connor. Both good ladies were all of a flutter.

"My dear Mrs. Connor—I have just engaged a treasure—a veritable treasure!"

Mrs. Connor smiled. "Aaron was telling me all about it. I have engaged Lily Belle at four dollars a week. She offered to start in at three-fifty, but——"

"I'm starting Sarah at the same wages. I haven't felt so relieved and happy over the servant question in all my married life. I don't know if Lily Belle is anything like her sister, but if she is, she looks like a perfect gem."

"And she talks so intelligently. None of the society airs which irritate me so. She agreed to come Monday morning and Aaron vouched for her appearance promptly at six-thirty."

"Sarah starts in with me Monday morning, too. I'm going to discharge Ella Sunday afternoon when I pay her off."



"I shall do the same thing with Mallissie. I feel that we are very fortunate, my dear."

"We are. And we mustn't forget to be grateful to Aaron for our good luck."

The following morning Aaron Segar entered the kitchen of Mrs. Charles Gray. He was patently perturbed. "Mis' Gray—I b'lieves in a man doin' his duty."

"Yes, Aaron, so do I. What is the trouble now?"

"Ain't nothin' the trouble *now*, Mis' Gray. On'y if'n them chillun of your'n had of been killed by that truck they'd of been trouble a-plenty."

Mrs. Gray stiffened. She clutched weakly at the edge of the kitchen table. "What are you talking about, Aaron?"

"'Bout what happen jes' now down to Five Points. I been comin' 'crost the circle fum the grocer-shop an' a big ol' truck been takin' the curve at about thutty mile an hour. An' who should I see rompin' right 'crost the middle of that street but yo' two chillum!"

"'Tain't nothin' to worry 'bout, Mis' Gray. I grab 'em an' pull 'em back befo' the truck done hit 'em. On'y it kind of made me mad, 'cause if'n that Fashi'n Wilson had of been watchin' them 'stead of makin' monkey eyes with ol' Florian Slappey who was loafin' 'roun' there, then mebbe you woul'n't of almos' had no chillun lef' a tall."

"Do you mean to tell me, Aaron, that Fashion allowed those two little darlings to walk alone into the middle of the street? Is that what you mean, Aaron?"

"'Tain't none of my business, Mis' Gray . . ."

"It is your business, Aaron. Human life is everybody's business. I've suspected for some time that Fashion is very derelict in the way she looks after the children. Why, do you know, Aaron, that sometimes they come home actually bruised and scratched where they have fallen down?"

"*Tchk!* Sho' nuff, now, Mis' Gray!"

"That really is so. Fashion is hopeless."

"She ain't no wuss all the other city nu'ses, Mis' Gray," defended Aaron stoutly. "All of 'em lets the chillun run wild. It's a Gawd's mercy they ain't kilt ev'y day. 'Co'se maybe Fashi'n is a li'l mite mo' careless'n them other nu'ses, 'cause this ain't by no means the fust time I've saw——"

Mrs. Gray collapsed limply. "I simply cannot tell you how much I appreciate this, Aaron."

"Tha's all right, Mis' Gray. 'Co'se I'd be 'bliged if'n you woul'n't mention to Fashi'n was me that tol' you——"

"I won't, Aaron; I won't. But what am I to do? I'm not a strong woman, Aaron, and I can't run this apartment and take care of those two children alone."

"Guess they ain't nothin' you c'n do, Mis' Gray. Less'n you could git hol' of a gal like Pansy."

"Who is Pansy?"

"Gal I been knowin' fo' yeahs. She ain't high-falutin' like Fashi'n an' these other gals 'roun' the Glen Ridge. She's a Georgy nigger. Las' job she had was fo' a lady what had a 'pahtment one room bigger'n what you is got—an' th'ee chillun. Pansy useter do all the cookin' an' the housewuk an' take care of the two oldest chilluns fo' brawtus<sup>11</sup> an' she useter say to me: 'Aaron, the wuk heah is so easy I kinder hates to take my week's wages.' Yassum, tha's zactly what she useter say, Mis' Gray."

"Where—where is Pansy now?"

"Right heah in town, Mis' Gray. She's kind of lookin' fo' a *pummanent* job."

"Aaron!"

A few minutes later Aaron descended the steps, wealthier by a dollar. "Yassum," he called back cheerily, "I'll bring Pansy heah t'night shuah at seven-thutty—after Fashi'n is

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11. *fo' brawtus*, before breakfast.

gone. An' if'n you like her I reckon she c'n come to wuk Monday mawnin'."

Before he reached the basement he was intercepted by Mrs. Franklin Carruthers, who summoned him to Apartment 17. "Aaron, did you succeed in seeing Mary?"

"Yassum, I seen Mary, sho' nuff."

"Did she have a place?"

"No'm, she ain't had no place. Course'n she had offers, but Mary's right 'tic'lar an' she wants a pummanent place."

"Do you think she'll work for me, Aaron? Do you—really?"

"Sho' does, Mis C'ruthers. I does, sho' nuff—an' that ain't no lie. Mary most'n always goes by my advice. She says she'll be heah t'night at eight o'clock sha'p—soon's she's sho' Gussie Muck is gone. An' then if you likes her you c'n let Gussie go when you pays her off on Sunday an' Mary'll be heah Monday mawnin' sha'p at six-thutty."

"I'm so grateful to you, Aaron, I'll confess to you that Gussie was getting positively unbearable. I didn't see how I could continue to put up with her, but in these days of servant famine I couldn't see my way clear to letting her go. You, Aaron, have been my Aladdin."

"Yassum, I sho' have. You done said it that time. An' I understan's jes' how you feel. Gussie Muck is one mo' wuthless gal. But Mary! Hones', Mis C'ruthers, that gal'd ruther cook an' clean house than eat, an' that sho' is the truth. Yassum—jes' sho's my name's Aaron Segar!"

On Sunday afternoon the Mesdames Carruthers, Connor, Gray, and Hammond discharged the four fiancées of Aaron Segar. On Sunday night the four worthy ladies retired early that Monday morning might sooner arrive. They were bulwarked behind the happy thought that this glorious Monday morning was to bring to each of them a servant who desired nothing so much as hard and permanent work. Early Monday morning Mesdames Carruthers, Con-

nor, Gray, and Hammond opened their eyes upon a sky of gray overcast with low-hanging, swiftly-scudding clouds. Each became aware of a void. Mrs. Charles Gray was first in action. Her two children were yelling lustily for the dear departed Fashion.

Aaron Segar was summoned to the kitchen of each of the four ladies in turn. To each he made the same shocked speech:

"I 'clare to goodness gracious if'n that gal don't beat all creation. Spec' they ain't *no* gals you c'n trus'. Take my oaf I'd of swore she'd be heah this mawnin' fust crack of day. I'se mighty sorry, 'cause tha's what makes white folks look down on us colored people w'en we treats you-all like that. Downright shame—tha's what I calls it."

To each he gave a solemn promise to search for the delinquent treasure; to each he reported two hours later that she was not found. Whereupon four highly-nervous and thoroughly disgruntled ladies entered four automobiles and placatingly sought four discharged servants—only to discover that they had obtained overnight easier positions at greater wages.

That day and the next there was a pall of gloom over Apartments 6, 9, 14, and 17. They didn't blame Aaron. In fact, they were sorry for him—he was so evidently cut up over the defection of his four servants. He railed against the quartet in particular and the genus housegirl in general.

But in the privacy of his basement apartment there was no hint of gloom. By some miracle it had worked. Gus-sie and Mallissie and Fashion and Ella had departed for sections of the city unknown. Small likelihood that they would bother him further, now that the dangerous element, of propinquity had been removed. He was by nature sufficiently insouciant to worry over the troubles of the immediate present only. Once again life had taken unto

itself a roseate hue—a hue which it retained until Thursday afternoon.

On Thursday afternoon Aaron Segar, elegantly groomed, paraded proudly up Highland Avenue with the beloved Ione on his arm. He had eyes for nothing save her radiance, and her orbs were modestly downcast, which is why neither of them had an opportunity to dodge Mrs. Jacob Hammond, who veered around the corner of Arlington Avenue and clutched Ione by the arm.

“Sarah!” cried Mrs. Hammond.

“Y-y-yassum!” gasped Ione.

“Where in the world have you been? Why didn’t you come to work on Monday?”

“I—I been sick,” faltered Ione. Aaron rallied loquaciously to her support.

“Yassum—she been sick, sho’ nuff. Jes’ met her, I did, an’ I was givin’ her a talkin’ to on account she didn’t show up fo’ wuk like she says she was gwine do, an’ she tells me she been sick. If’n you don’ b’lieve it you c’n call Florian Slappey, sec’terry of The Sons & Daughters of I Will Arise, an’ he’ll tell you she’s been gittin’ her sick benyfit.” It was a glorious bluff, but it worked. Mrs. Hammond did not know that colored insurance fraternities pay no benefits for illness lasting less than one week.

“But you are well now, aren’t you, Sarah?”

“Yassum, I’s e well now,” answered Ione eagerly. “Well’s I ev’ was.”

“And you still want the place?”

“If it’s pummanent, Mis’ Hammond. I was gwine to see you ’bout it this evenin’ . . .”

“It’s permanent,” wheedled Mrs. Hammond pathetically. “The position is yours forever if you want it. Please don’t disappoint me again. May I count on you for tomorrow morning?”

“You sho’ c’n . . .”

Aaron gave a sudden gasp. He clutched Ione's wrist. His eyes opened until it seemed that they must pop from the sockets. Small beads of cold perspiration stood out on his brow. But he was too late. The little car pulled up at the curb and the Mesdames Franklin Carruthers and Percival Connor alighted. Each of them pounced upon the petrified Ione.

"Mary!" cried Mrs. Carruthers.

"Lily Belle!" exclaimed Mrs. Connor.

"Uh-huh . . . yassum . . ." trembled Ione weakly.

"Why didn't you come to work Monday morning?" chorused the newcomers. Ione said nothing. Aaron Segar said the same thing.

"There is some mistake," cut in Mrs. Hammond icily. "Isn't there, Sarah?"

"Y-y-yassum; they's a mistake."

"They sho' is!" muttered Aaron to himself.

"Why do you persist in addressing her as 'Sarah'?" interrogated Mrs. Connor frigidly. "Her name is Lily Belle, and I hired her to come to work for me Monday morning."

"But—but—" groped Mrs. Carruthers blindly, "she agreed to come to work for *me* Monday morning and she said her name was Mary!"

Mrs. Hammond whirled on Aaron. "What is the meaning of this?" she snapped.

Aaron took one wild glance at the three faces. His knees quaked. His eyes rolled toward Ione, girl of his choice. His muscular fingers tightened around her arm and he gave her a violent jerk. Man and woman, they started up Arlington Avenue at a pace which should have entitled them to the heel-and-toe championship of the world.

"S-s-s-see you-all ladies later," chattered Aaron over his shoulder. "We is got to be goin'!"

Two blocks farther on they paused and faced one an-

other. Aaron mopped his face with a lavender handkerchief.

"Ione," he proclaimed solemnly, "I is been thinkin'."

"So is I, Aaron."

"I is been thinkin', Ione, that mebbe it might be po' business takin' you to the Glen Ridge 'pahments to live."

"Reckon 'twould, Aaron."

"I—I so't of favor the idee, hon, that mebbe I'll git me a job out to the Ensley steel mill. They ain't no wimmin out there. I guess that'd be safer fo' a man like what I is."

"Yes," answered his bride-to-be significantly, "I reckon it would!"

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS

"Not Wisely But Too Well" was first published in *The Saturday Evening Post*, February 22, 1919.

1. The negro has been a familiar figure in the American short story since the publication of the first stories of Joel Chandler Harris, Thomas Nelson Page, and Ruth McEnery Stuart. In the stories of these earlier writers, the negro was represented as a type of the old slave days on Southern plantations, or he was drawn from the generation which immediately followed the Civil War. This civilization has passed in the South, and the type of negro represented by Harris's Uncle Remus has passed with it. Industrial development in the South has been rapid. Cities have grown. The old plantations have been broken up into small farms. With these altered conditions of life, the negro has changed. Along with the white man, he has moved in large numbers from the country to the town and to the city, and has adapted himself to these new conditions of life with the same ready imitative spirit which he has always shown in taking on the neighboring white man's manners and customs. It is this modernized negro who furnishes the type for the "negro story" of today. The stories of no writer who has presented the up-to-date city negro have been more popular than those of Octavus Roy Cohen.

2. Retell the plot of "Not Wisely But Too Well" in a few hundred words. To what is due the difference in effect between



your version and that of the writer of the story? Does he depend for his effect upon plot arrangement, characterization, the use of dialect? Or what is his secret? What proportion of the story is in dialogue?

3. Study the dialect. How does it differ from the dialect used by Uncle Remus? Do you think that the use of dialect in this story is overdone?

4. Why is the negro almost always presented as a humorous character in short stories? What are the elements in the humor of "Not Wisely But Too Well"?

*Suggested Reading.*—Other negro stories: *Green Thursdays* by Mrs. Julia E. Peterkin; *E. K. Means, More E. K. Means* by E. K. Means; *Children of the Mist* by George Madden Martin; "Something to Remember" by Beatrice Ravenel (*Harper's Magazine*, January, 1920); "The Chocolate Hyena" by Irvin S. Cobb (O'Brien, 1923); "Black Art and Ambrose" by Guy Gilpatrick (O. Henry, 1920).

*Biographical Note.*—Octavus Roy Cohen is a native of South Carolina. Since his graduation from Clemson College in 1911 he has had a busy career as civil engineer, newspaper editor, lawyer, and writer. Mr. Cohen now lives in Birmingham, the city in which his stories have their setting.

## THE NATURE OF AN OATH\*

KATHARINE FULLERTON GEROULD

A man of thirty leaned with crossed arms upon a rustic gate, and stared across the quiet road to a thicket of pine-oaks opposite him. The road, though a public one, was narrow and winding; a true wood road, although it had once been macadamized. Behind the man curled the path by which he had come: a mysterious lane winding about among the beeches that were now a woodland maze of palest gold. Backed by that poetic unreality—for beech woods in autumn are unreal—he stood facing the tarnished bronze of the oaks beyond, and only the road lay between. Philip Lester was not physically unworthy to stand amid these seasonal glories. A high-bred, sunburned, intellectual type he was: a notable combination of fine muscles and exceeding sensitiveness of feature and expression. For all that perfection of flesh and sinew, he stood contemplative, quiet as a tree.

Presently he turned his head at some strange explosive sounds that came to his ear from beyond a turning in the road. He started, half turned back to the path that stretched away behind him; but one strong, slender hand still rested on the gate. Before he had made up his mind, the motor skidded round the turn and stopped dead in front of him with chemical ejaculations of fury or despair. The

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possessor leaped to the ground, squatted for a moment on the far side of the machine, then bobbed his head up and spied Lester at the gate.

"I say, will you lend me a hand?" he cried.

"The gate is locked," Lester replied slowly.

"You look almost strong enough to jump over." The stranger's smile was winning. "If I had another pair of hands here for a few minutes, I believe I could make town."

Lester took his hand from the gate and slued round to face the beech wood. "I'll get them to telephone the garage for you," he called back over his shoulder. It was not his fault that he looked like a lord as he turned a magnificent back on trouble.

The man beside the car, however, saw only six feet of obvious competence strolling nonchalantly away from him. "Damned churl!" he ejaculated. But, even if Philip Lester had heard, he would have been unmoved.

As soon as Lester drew out of eyeshot among the trees, he quickened his pace and took the remaining distance at an easy lope. In five minutes he was at the end of the path's fantastic windings, and stood before his father's house. The wide door was open to the late sun. He passed through, hesitated beside the telephone closet, then shrugged his broad shoulder, and delved into the service passage.

"Mary, Charlotte—somebody! Please go to the telephone and call up the garage, whatever it is. There's a man in trouble with his car down by the west gate. Tell them to send someone out at once. Thanks."

He mounted the wide staircase as soon as he was answered, waiting on the landing just long enough to see Charlotte stepping competently to the telephone.

"The west gate, Mr. Philip?"

"Yes, where the beech path hits the road."

He wandered down a corridor to his own room. From

his window he could see infinite tree-tops, and, sunk among them at intervals, dim spots of leaf-strewn lawn. A little chill had come into the air, for it was on<sup>1</sup> for October. Lester looked at a calendar on his wall. "Well, daylight saving will soon be over, thank Heaven," he muttered. "Why won't they dine later while the infernal thing is on?" At last he turned away from the window, which had lost the sun, and proceeded to the boresome ritual of "dressing."

By the time the Lester family sat over their soup in the dim dining-room, it was much darker. But the curtains were undrawn, the twilight still struggled with the lamps inside, and through the big windows you could still see the world.

An exuberant stranger entering upon the trio might well have exclaimed over a happy chance. Rupert Lester, Philip's father, was handsome still: a rock of a man without a rock's repose. Brow and chin were strong, but the eyes and mouth were uneasy and seemed to resent their own trouble. Grace and strength were mingled in the elder Lester, but not, as in Philip, harmonized. The entering stranger, however, would only have seen that nature had been lavish here . . . A fine pair . . . And Lucilla, Philip's wife, was the delicate foil to that male strength of the Lesters: almost too exquisitely made for beauty, which is a word of lavish and wasteful implication. A physician could have pointed to the rose of her cheek, the scarlet of her lips, the steadiness of her white hand, the luster of her hair, as signs of perfect health. Yet the blundering stranger would have drawn a breath of relief that Lucilla sat between such men, who could shield her both from the east wind and the north. Her delicacy put sense into their strength, as their power might find a purpose in her grace. The philosophic eye would have been rarely pleased.

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1. *it was on*, i.e., the season was far advanced.

Philip Lester and his wife spoke in low tones, of little things. Rupert Lester made his comments in deeper and harsher notes. There was hardly enough conversation to spill over into the intervals of the waitress's absence. It seemed not so much relief as the lack of any cue that kept them silent when there was no servant to hear. The talk slid about among the courses: some new books, the felling of a tree that had been struck by lightning; the gardener's dog for which the "vet" had been sent; the loveliness of the beech woods; a little explosion over the behavior of Congress, from the elder Lester. The urbanity in which Philip and his wife were perfect fell a little short in Philip's father. He seemed, at least, to achieve it only with some effort. He made no protest when young Mrs. Lester rose, at the end of the meal, and murmured that she would leave them to smoke.

"So soon?" Philip queried with a smile.

She shrugged her graceful shoulders and protested amiably that there was some new music waiting for her in the drawing-room.

As Philip rose and shut the dining-room door, both his face and his father's changed. Rupert Lester ceased to struggle for urbanity, and the morose uneasiness deepened. Philip's smile faded, and a patient mask seemed to fit down upon his features. The urbane convention had gone with Lucilla.

"What is this about a man in the road before dinner—over by the west gate?" asked the father abruptly.

"I was at the gate, looking over at the oaks, when a motor-car spun round the turn and stopped—against its will, I judged. The driver got out and started to tinker with it. Then he saw me and asked for help. I refused it—at least, I did not respond to his suggestion. Instead, I offered to telephone to a garage, and walked back to the

house at once, to do so. I think he probably swore at me, but I didn't wait to hear."

It was spoken like evidence given in a court of law; every trace of feeling sponged out of the phrases.

"Humph! And did you telephone?"

"Not literally. I asked Charlotte to do it."

"You didn't go into the road?"

Philip's white teeth bit into his under lip, and he seemed to be struggling physically with the tide of blood that swept up to his very brow.

"No, sir."

"Is that all you said to the fellow—or he to you?"

"All."

"You didn't know him—never saw him before?"

Philip swallowed hard and painfully. Then something snapped and he lost the fight for control. Perhaps it was the uneasiness in that inquisitorial face opposite that broke his patience; the chink in the armor that tempted him to strike back. Though, when he spoke, it was quietly.

"I see no possible excuse for your doubting my word. I have never lied to you. I have never broken a promise. Have I?" he challenged sharply.

"No." There was pain in that harsh, unsteady voice. "But how can I know that you never will lie to me? How am I to know you won't plot and plan? How can I help making sure? It's not as if you had never done anything I shouldn't have expected of you! My God, Philip, do you realize what this means to me?" The words finished in bitterness as well as pain.

Philip Lester walked to the window and drew the heavy curtain. Then he turned, backed by the crimson draperies.

"Let's keep to the subject in hand," he said more quietly. "I've accepted your terms, and lived up to them in absolute loyalty. If I hadn't answered the fellow this afternoon,

he'd have reported that you kept a full-sized idiot on the place. I've told you everything that passed between us. And I maintain that you have no right, no excuse, no provocation even, when you doubt my keeping the oath I made to you—if I remember correctly—twelve days more than five years ago."

He turned white, even as he spoke; for his explicit reference to a date brought back to both of them a stark fact better not dragged into talk, though it shaped the daily lives of three people. Rupert Lester's head drooped on his breast, though he still stared at his son. Philip's own eyes deepened and darkened as he looked straight ahead of him, across the lighted table, at the wall far beyond. Both were silent under the shock of an identical memory; both, by the trick of Philip's unlucky words, were forced to tear away the veil of years and behold the same scene, the same hour, the same horror. Philip Lester felt through his frame the very tautness and strain of the muscles that he had felt five years—and twelve days—before; felt his right arm grow rigid again as it had grown rigid when he leaned over the side of the launch and held his drowning brother inexorably down under the rippling surface of the water. He had not Arthur's wicked, gloating face to see now, for he had hardly seen it then. Cramp had seized Arthur; and Philip had only, first, heard the cry, and then seen the formless struggle. He was not now recalling his own anger, his own hatred, or the immediate causes of them, which had made his brother seem to him a noxious, monstrous thing. Only his body seemed to remember and repeat. His right arm was tense with that revived strain; his eyes, gazing at the paneled wall of the dining-room, saw his father's figure standing on the edge of the lake, and the field-glasses leveled on himself. Though Philip Lester's lips were closed, he spoke inwardly, the very words he had muttered



five years earlier: "He saw me . . ." Philip relaxed his arm deliberately. It ached—as it had ached five years before. His body trembled with weakness. "This mustn't happen again," he whispered to himself. Then he walked to the table and sat down again opposite his father, who had not once spoken, and looked at him now only with intolerable dull sadness.

Philip folded his arms on the table, moistened his lips, and began haltingly.

"I was wrong to bring a moment like that upon us both. Unless we keep absolutely silent on this subject we can't live at all, any one of us; you, or I—or Lucilla. Therefore one thing must be understood between you and me: that I am incapable of breaking my word to you. If you stop to think, you will realize that I have never challenged one of your decisions. I have never argued, I have made no single comment, ever. I have simply acquiesced in all your demands. If I had any intention of trying to circumvent you, I'd have done it at the beginning. The threats have all been yours. I have never made any."

"What threats could you have made?" It was asked scornfully.

Philip was easier now. He reached for a cigarette and lighted it. "The threat, for example, of going and giving myself up to the authorities with a full and free confession of having killed my brother."

Rupert Lester turned white. "But I am in possession of the only evidence against you." His voice shook.

"Exactly." Philip let the single word sink in. Then he went on. "The thing cannot be decided over again now. Only I ask you to remember that you have never, once, heard my side of the case. You proceeded, on the facts known to you, to make the whole decision. You gave me your verdict. I was to keep myself in a strictly voluntary

imprisonment, holding no communication with the world outside this household. If I did not intend to abide by your judgment absolutely, the time to say so was then—when things could have been decided otherwise. Do you think a man signs away his freedom like that, unless he has an overwhelming conviction that, in all the circumstances, it is the only thing to do? If I didn't fight then, I shan't fight now. But you've got to trust me. We can't have this kind of scene. We can't stand it."

The older man had sunk into moodiness. "It's my conscience . . . I'm not sure I wasn't wrong—taking the law into my hands. 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' Scripture says. But it was my own beloved son." He murmured the last words pathetically to himself.

"Your conscience is your own affair," Philip answered patiently. "I have subordinated mine in every way to yours. But if it is any comfort to you to know that the punishment you dictated to me has been pretty nearly intolerable—that a chain-gang could hardly have been worse—you can take that comfort to yourself." There was no bitterness in his tone now. He spoke as one genuinely offering solace.

"Comfort!" The eldest Lester groaned.

"Yes; comfort. The human soul is strangely made, isn't it?" He bent over his father, as he passed behind him, with a sort of dark tenderness, but straightened himself immediately. "I'm going in to see Lucilla for five minutes before I go up."

Mr. Lester did not reply, and Philip left the room. With the mention of his wife's name urbanity descended on him again. As he passed through the door, he looked like a gentleman bent on civilized pleasures in festal halls.

His manner to his wife, when he reached her, was a

shade more formal than it had been at the dinner-table. Alone together, they seemed less intimate. "You said you had some new music. Have you time to run through something for me before I get back to work?"

Lucilla Lester rose from the piano and handled some music lying beside her.

"You stayed longer over your smoking than usual," she answered. "I had given you up."

"Yes. We had some talk."

"What about?" She fingered her music busily and did not look at her husband. Her manner was so simple in its courteous formality that no one could have said whether she abstained voluntarily from the contemplation of that handsome figure.

"Oh, a detail that came up. It's all settled now."

"What shall I play?"

"Anything you like that isn't Chopin."

She settled to a morsel of Debussy.<sup>2</sup> Lester thanked her when she had finished. "It's as unreal as life, isn't it? Good fare for us all. I'm awfully obliged. Now I'm going to tackle those new books."

"Are they interesting?"

"Haven't had a chance to dip in yet. They ought to be. This theory of the spread of heliolithic culture is rather thrilling—if you're thrilled by that sort of thing." The naked irony of his tone hit his wife's ear, and in spite of her mastery she winced a little.

"Oh, but you are thrilled," Lucilla protested lightly.

He smiled. "Yes, I am thrilled. Thank you for insisting. By the way, Susan said you had a chill last night. Was it bad?"

"No—not bad. She got me a hot drink. I was asleep

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2. *Debussy*, Claude (1862-1918), whose music is noted for its refinement and depth of intellectual expression.

soon after one. I'm too apt to be careless these first cool evenings."

"Yes, I—remember. Can I get you a shawl or anything now? Or would you like a window closed?"

"No, thank you. There's a fire in my room, and I'm going up presently."

"I see. That's wise of you. Good-night." He bowed and went out.

The scene—if "scene" anything so bitterly quiet could be called—in the dining-room had no sequel. Yet who shall say that Philip Lester's painful evocations did not serve their turn, by "preparing" him, in the old cant phrase? For the peace which seemed to settle about them all again on the morrow was destined to be short-lived—a respite, a breathing-space, but no more. Three days after that sharp, significant talk, Rupert Lester was brought into his own house dead. The master who had ordained the strange life of that household walked out of it, a sad and powerful man in the prime of later middle age; he came back to it, by the strength of others, to ask only such respect as tenantless clay immemorially demands. The accident that had crushed life out of him is no part of our tale, nor the blank horror of the household, the running to and fro, the offices rendered and the offices forgotten. By evening the wild pulses were stilled, and the household, though sad and awe-struck, was itself again.

Philip Lester, after nightfall, stood alone in the library with his father's body. After long musing, he bent over and laid a hand on the still heart. To keep him shackled, this organ had only to pump blood according to the laws of nature. It had stopped pumping blood, and he was unloosed. Humph! There was more to it than that.

Lucilla stepped into the shadowy room with flowers

crowding her slender arms. She disposed them—then sighed. On the wings of that sigh her eyes fluttered up to her husband, standing, with arms crossed before her.

“If there is anything I can do—” she began in her own fashion of delicate speech.

“Thank you, Lucilla. I think not. You had better rest. It is you, I’m afraid, who will have to see all the people and give all the directions. I’m out of it—publicly, at least. But tonight my place is here.”

“Do you think you need?”

“I don’t know. But I shall. We’ll share the burden. You do the public rites. I’ll watch here.”

“Do you think he would have wished it?”

“The answer to that is”—he drew a little farther into the shadow so that she could not see him plainly—“that my wishing it is more important than his. But I honestly think he would have wished it. The next best thing, for him, to taking me with him would have been to keep me by his side as long as they left him above ground.”

There was no bitterness in his tone, but she shivered a little, as if coldness had breathed upon her.

“Just now,” she said reflectively, “I think the tragedy of his being killed like that might supersede everything else. Don’t you? Couldn’t you be—natural, about it?”

Philip Lester smiled. “It is a long time since I have been natural about anything in the world. But this is as natural a thing as I can do. My father loved me, Lucilla. Now that he is dead, I can admit it. He couldn’t feel simply about anything. But he would certainly have approved my staying here.”

Lucilla turned to go, but paused a moment in the doorway. “I don’t think even your father would have wanted you so close, hating him.”

Lester smiled very faintly. "Have you a right to say that I shall be hating him? Have you known one least thought of mine for five years, Lucilla?"

"No."

"Well, then, you'll have to leave it. If you can tell me that you loved him so much that you grudge my place here beside him—I might yield it to you. Is that what you are trying to say?"

"I am not trying to say anything. I wondered if it were necessary—normal. And I want you not to forget that, tomorrow, you will have to do a great many things to help me, if I am to put all this through as it should be put through."

"You needn't be afraid that I shall fail you tomorrow, Lucilla."

"But you will be ill—if you sit here all night in this cold room."

"I may not sit here all night. I have a coat, in any case. And I am in wonderfully good condition. If you would only tell me quite honestly, Lucilla, what it is you are afraid of, I might set your fears at rest."

"I can't quite say. I am tired and don't think clearly. But there is nothing within the whole range of mortal possibilities that I have not been afraid of, at one time or another, these last five years. And now, of course, there are new things to be afraid of."

She left the room then, closing the door softly behind her.

Lucilla afraid! It was a new vision of her, even to Philip Lester. But he must not stop to think about Lucilla's fears now. There was other meditation afoot, between him, his demon, and the half-menacing clay beside him. A fine figure of a man, his father. Now that all traces of perplexity had been smoothed out by death, what did Rupert Lester think? Young Lester clinched his fist

lightly. It didn't matter what Rupert Lester thought. His thoughts were dead. What did he, Philip, think? That was the supreme question. Hour after hour, until close on dawn, Lester sat in the deep armchair, stirring only now and then to pace the floor with light, slow steps, facing his altered plight, conversing inwardly with his demon. Rupert Lester lay there to witness, his face turned upward as if mutely searching heaven . . . Bar the new facts that might still appear. . . .

He did not look back at his father when he finally closed the door softly and went up to his own room. Nor did he speak to Lucilla about anything but practical detail, until the funeral was over. At the last, it was Lucilla who saw the few people who had to be seen—Pender the lawyer, as well as the few cousins who lived near enough to attend.

Lester and his wife dined that evening as usual. As usual, that is, with the immense difference of Rupert Lester's chair, empty, at the head of the table. In little ways, however, they followed the ritual. The talk was as courteous and desultory as ever, before the devoted servants who had never penetrated the mystery of the household, but who, having known Philip Lester many years, adored him. It was for Philip's sake—not Rupert Lester's, or even Lucilla's—that Susan, Charlotte, and the others asked no questions, even of one another.

As of old, Lucilla rose to leave her husband in the dining-room with his cigarette. Only this time there was no pretense of new music to lure her to the drawing-room, which had now been tenderly restored to its own cheerful mien. No mortuary hint was there. The great bowls of chrysanthemums and cosmos had been filled within the hour. The funeral blooms had gone with Rupert Lester, never to return.

Lucilla did not go to the piano, but sat instead in a



high-backed chair, leaning her chin on her hand, staring at the great dusk-filled window beyond her—waiting. Nor did she wait long. Philip walked in presently, cigarette in hand, and closed the big double doors behind him. Lucilla made no comment on the cigarette, though it transgressed one of Rupert Lester's laws. He had been old-fashioned enough to think tobacco out of place in the drawing-room.

"Pray excuse this." Philip flicked the ash off into the fireplace. "I didn't wish to keep you waiting . . . What did Pender say?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"I mean—he says he is sure your father never made a will. He reproached him about it not many weeks ago. And he has examined your father's papers, and has found nothing—of any sort."

"I see." A slow flush rose to Lester's forehead. He was thinking hard. "You don't think Pender is holding off? That he was—deceiving you?" he asked meditatively.

"No, I don't. Otherwise he would not have told me to tell you that, as your father died intestate, you succeed to everything—and that he should want to talk a lot of business with you as soon as you felt that you could see him."

"Unless he is staying his hand—taking time to think. That might all be true, and still there might have been another document and he might have rushed home with it to consider—or take measures." Philip Lester was thinking aloud, only.

Lucilla rose. "There was nothing of the sort. The only thing you have to worry about is being a rich man in your own right. You are perfectly free." There was the faintest note of irony—or was it only sharp pity?—in her cool voice.

"Thanks for the assurance." Philip's irony was quite

obvious, and her shoulders moved a little at the sound of his voice.

"You may take it as a fact, simply. There was nothing. I think I'll go upstairs now." She nodded at him.

"Don't let me turn you out. I'm going into the library."

"Oh, I wouldn't. It's chilly and musty in there, and I told them not to light a fire."

"Then I'll go to my own room." Philip raised his voice in irritation. "But this place is yours. I won't have you hunted out of it—as long as you are here."

Lucilla swayed a little toward him and smiled faintly. "Don't be absurd. I'm not hunted out. But I feel quite sure you would rather be alone. It's a good deal of money, by the way—more than I should have guessed."

"He's probably pretty sick about it—if he knows," Lester mused harshly.

Lucilla flung back her head. "Well, then, let him be! He had only himself to blame. He could have made a will any time. I think your father was probably one of those men who can't face the possibility of their own death. He funk'd it. Pure cowardice, probably."

"Not that. Perhaps I see better than you do, Lucilla, what a hole he was in. If he made a will, it had to be of a certain kind—any old kind you like, but definite. You must remember that my father was always pulled in two directions. Nothing was clear to him; how could he make a clear testament? Every act of his life for five years has been an unwilling compromise—between caring more what happened to my little finger than what happened to Arthur's whole rotten body, and thinking that God Almighty wanted me to be hanged. I've been both Cain and Abel to him . . . Not so easy to make a will, under those conditions."

"I dare say. I'm not so psychological as you are."

"No, you're beyond psychology. A sort of Ariel . . .  
'Mine would, sir, were I human.'"<sup>3</sup>

Lucilla Lester turned away. "It hasn't been the easiest household in the world to be what you call human in. If you have anything to reproach me with, Philip, perhaps you had better do it now."

"Reproach you!" he cried. "No other woman in the world could have lived as you have, among such emotions, and stayed sweet and unscathed and mannerly throughout. You're a miracle, Lucilla—such a miracle that I say you are not human. But it is over now. You're free. My father's death frees you."

"It frees you, for that matter." She looked at him intently.

"No death but my own can free me—even though bondage should take another form. But you can be sure that I shall not permit you to go on wasting your life in this morbid way."

She bent toward him with apprehensive eyes. "Just what do you mean?"

"I mean that, whatever my own penalties are to be, I have determined that they shall no longer involve you."

"You don't take your own freedom, then?"

He frowned. "I have no freedom of my own. But I have now the power to give you yours."

"In all senses but one, I've always been free."

He passed his hand over his forehead and sighed. "It's I who am not up to your complications, I'm afraid. I'm at the end of my tether. Good-night. We'll have a prac-

3. *Mine would, sir, etc.* From Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, V, i, 20-23;

"*Ariel.*

Your charm so strongly works 'em  
That if you now beheld them, your affections  
Would become tender.

*Prospero.*

*Ariel.*

Dost thou think so, spirit?  
"Mine would, sir, were I human."

tical talk tomorrow. I suppose I mayn't kiss your hand, Lucilla?"

She put it out to him, her eyes wet with tears. "For all it's worth," she said strangely, "you might kiss it to pieces."

"Ah, don't!" The choked cry was deep in his throat. He turned from her, and after one glance at him, Lucilla left the room, holding her unknissed hand like a hurt thing to her own lips.

Presently Philip Lester walked to each big window and flung the curtains back. He turned out all but one or two of the lamps, so that the moonlight took the edges of the room. In this half-gloom, half-radiance, he walked himself giddy, with quick steps and short, sharp turns. He was free, since his father's rigid hand had really unclosed in death—free to end, in one way or another, a life he could not endure another week . . . Lucilla should go—he gritted his teeth. While Rupert Lester lived, it had been just possible to live that life in the formal shadow of his presence. Now he could not endure the added touch of intimacy, the moments, the hours, when he must needs be alone with his wife because there was no one else to be a third. Oh, Lucilla should go! There were tortures that even a murderer was not called on to bear. She was young and lovely and sane; let her enter her heritage out there in a world where the sun was not tainted each day at his rising.

Before long the door opened softly, and he saw Lucilla, no longer in tragic black, but floating forward mistily, as it seemed, out of the heart of a rose. He had not seen her so, in these delicate draperies, for more than five years. Over the pink of her tea-gown lay a soft scarf of deeper pink, and she was shod with gold. Yes, he remembered; Lucilla had always loved those slashed, formless, diaphan-

ous things. Probably all this time she had been wearing them in her own rooms. He had simply forgotten. They had not been like other families. . . .

He faced her with folded arms. This person should leave his house tomorrow; take her goodness and sweetness to places where they had a right to flower.

"Philip, I've come for a talk." She waved him to a chair, then sat down near him. "I have held my tongue for five years. Now I am going to say certain things I've never said. Remember that for five years no human being has had any inkling of what I felt. I might have had, as you say, no heart; and I might equally well have had no brain. Now you and I are going to talk—freely. But, first, I wish to know what you consider the conditions of your bondage."

"I haven't decided."

"You have decided something," she affirmed.

"At first I thought I should go straight to the minions of the law. It would have been the easiest way out. The first night, I thought of it with relief. Then I considered that my father might have chosen his own way of controlling my future after his death. You seem to be sure he didn't. I am not sure yet, though it looks that way. But I have done a good deal of reflecting, and it seems to me that it is too late to go with a confession unbolstered by any human evidence. Too late to expose my father as an accomplice after the facts. Too late, in short, to do anything but continue the conditions he imposed—bar one. I am not going to keep you here. Otherwise I shall go on, I think, as I have gone on all these years. It would be relief, in a way, if he had left a paper for Pender. And it may still be that Pender has some such thing. For he wouldn't have told you, Lucilla, if there had been anything."

"Of course he wouldn't. So I took the precaution of looking first."

"You?"

"Quite so. The key to your father's desk was in his pocket. I found it in his bedroom, where they had put his things. I made a thorough search."

A quick interrogation gleamed in Philip's eyes. "If you had found something—"

"If I had found anything, I should have destroyed it—like this." She pulled a paper from her bosom, and thrust it into the fire, cramming it down between the logs. One sharp little blaze, and then it fell to tinder.

"Lucilla!" Philip leaped to the fire to retrieve it, but her movement had been too quick.

"What was that?" His eyes almost glared at her.

"That was a statement. It wasn't addressed to anybody. So I took the liberty of assuming that it was addressed to me."

"But Lucilla!" His trouble put a sharp edge on his voice.

"It was nothing but a statement," she said patiently. "He might have written it down to refresh his own memory. It was not even sealed. There was no indication that he meant it to be read by anybody, ever. It seemed to me to be very distinctly none of Mr. Pender's business."

"You lied to me when you said there was nothing." He kept reproach out of his voice; but his tone must have made it clear to her that he regretted some vision lost.

"Yes—because I had to know what, if you were really free, you would do with your freedom. It wasn't my business, in a sense. In another, it was. I had, that is, for my own sake, to find out—all over again—just what you were like. That was why. You will agree, though, Philip, that

I acknowledged the lie at the first possible moment. It wasn't allowed to stand an hour."

"It wasn't right to destroy it," he murmured. "That was unworthy of you."

"I never pretended to be superhuman," she answered smoothly. "But this is the first lie I ever told—and I didn't tell it very long. It's the first time I ever stole, too—and I only stole from you. Everything that was your father's is yours, you see. Who can say that he ever meant it for Pender?"

"He certainly didn't mean it for you or me," Philip retorted bitterly.

"He may have meant it only for himself. He wasn't prepared for death."

"And you are very sure," Philip asked ironically, "that there was no will? I mean before Pender had access to his desk."

Lucilla flushed. "I give you my word of honor that this is the only lie I ever told—and I took it back, as I pointed out to you, within the hour. I only lied at all because I had to know what you would do if you thought you were perfectly free."

"Well, you found out. But you could still have given the paper to me. You needn't have burned it. That—perpetuates the lie, doesn't it?"

"I can't split hairs. I felt the thing should be destroyed."

"You admit I had a right to it."

"Oh, your rights, Philip! You take some of them so seriously and some of them so lightly."

"At all events," he said grimly, "everything is changed. You have put me in a very difficult position, Lucilla. Since the paper was there, and since it may have been meant for Pender or any outsider, I shall—I think—have to behave as if it had been tampered with—as if Pender had seen it."



"What do you mean?"

He sighed. "Oh, go through with the whole business. Tell my past to the district attorney."

Lucilla looked at him a long time before she replied. Then she sighed deeply.

"More work for me," she murmured. "You give me a very delicate and difficult task, in that case. It is pure madness on your part. But I'll see it through—I'll see it through."

"What do you mean?" he asked, in his turn.

"Why, just this, Philip. That if you are going to state things to the authorities, I am going to state things to them, too."

"What can you state, Lucilla?"

"Oh, a lot of things. With your father dead and that paper burned, I am pretty powerful, I think. All the circumstances will bolster up my story. Nothing will bolster up yours."

"And your story will be—?"

"Delusions. Perfectly sane in every other way. But your not being able to save Arthur when he drowned turned your brain just a little. You never got rid of the false conviction that you had killed him. There was no reason to commit you to a sanitarium. We arranged, your father and I, to keep you here; to give up our lives to making you as happy as we could. Your imprisonment was your own idea; we humored it. In fact, we treated the whole thing as a prolonged nervous breakdown. We always hoped for a complete recovery, and lately, the delusions seemed to be practically gone. Then the shock of your father's death brought back the mental illness—opened the lesion afresh. The servants, you know, have always thought there was something the matter with your health—that that was why you lived this secluded life. Not one of them knows anything."

"But if I can prove I killed him!" Philip brought his fist down on the arm of his chair.

"You can't. You've no proof beyond your bare word."

"They'd be bound to investigate."

"There's nothing for them to investigate. It's a closed incident. Your father testified to the cramp, the coroner gave his verdict. They couldn't convict you."

"I'll make them!" He got up and started to pace the room.

Lucilla rose, too. Her exceeding quietness veiled the fact that she was braced in every nerve and sinew for a supreme effort.

"Listen, Philip. If you will listen to me now, I'll never ask you to listen to me again." She put her hand on his arm, to stop his feverish pacing. So they stood.

"I told you I knew why you killed Arthur. I knew more than you ever knew. And that record exists, though I shan't tell you where. Enough, so that if you had been indicted for killing your brother, any jury would have let you off—if I had produced the record, as of course I should have done. Arthur had plotted more deeply than even you knew."

"Why did you never tell my father?"

"It wouldn't have affected him. He guessed it, in a dim, unhappy way. He knew, and you knew, and I knew, that with all the provocation in the world, a man has no right to kill. We won't lower ourselves to a jury's point of view until we have to deal with a jury. It was right that you should pay, somehow. I think the whole thing was mismanaged. But I gave in, too—anything rather than a murder charge. I was weak about it; but, you see . . . I loved you, Philip. That is another fact you have apparently not taken into consideration."

"We have been absolute strangers—not even friends,

Lucilla—for five years.” His voice was broken. “I didn’t blame you—who could expect a woman not to shrink from a man who had done what I had done? But it would have been impossible for me to think that you—loved me.”

“Ah, you are not so clever as I thought you,” she said a little sadly. “I thought you would see your father’s hand in it. It was he who, less than twenty-four hours after that terrible thing happened, made it a condition of my staying under his roof. I was free to go—but not free to stay on any terms but those. He wouldn’t have stood for friendship, even. I made no promises. I only succumbed to a threat. I’ve always loved you, Philip. I hoped you knew. Whether you still loved me or not, I wasn’t sure. But I think you do—even though you want to send me away.”

He pressed her hand suddenly, violently, until it hurt, but he did not speak. Lucilla’s lips twisted a little with the pain, but she did not take her hand from that ruthless, passionate grasp.

“I don’t say it was right for me to hunt among the papers,” she went on, less firmly. “Or right for me to destroy that—or right for me to lie. I’ve probably been very wicked the last two days. But this isn’t a simple situation. It is false, any way you look at it. It is the lies your father told, five years ago, that make it hard for us to tell the truth now. To have had it all out in court would have been far easier than what we have been through. But, rightly or wrongly, this case has been judged. You can’t drag it up again. If we could obliterate five years, and stand up before the world and get justice done—but we can’t. Therefore I am not going to let you suffer fresh injustices. Not you, Philip, who stand ready to keep your oath when there is no one to force you. Your father has us caught fast in the situation he made. We can’t get out

of it now. It is too late. Any lie I might tell, to keep you as you are, would be truth compared with the mess that strangers would make of it all now. You let yourself in for a lie in the first place, Philip, when you stood, like a dumb animal, and let your father judge. You say you still think you were right. Well, then, I am right, to keep that lie going; to insist on maintaining, as he maintained, that Arthur was drowned accidentally. As for you: you made an oath and kept it. You were still prepared to keep it when all compulsion was removed. That, to me, is the root of the matter."

He still made no reply, only stared somberly into the distance. So many fundamental facts of his life had changed within the hour. . . .

"I'm tired," Lucilla said very softly. "I'm sorry you feel about me as you do. Perhaps you will understand better when you think it over. If you don't—I must go, of course. Not tomorrow—I'm too tired to get ready—but the day after."

"I said you must go, Lucilla, because I love you. I couldn't face living here alone with you as we have lived."

"Of course not. If I stayed with you, I should stay as your wife, Philip. But—now that I've torn up a paper—I suppose you won't have me."

She extricated her hand from his grasp, not without difficulty, and started to leave the room.

But Philip Lester, in his torture of perplexity, saw one thing plain: that, if Lucilla went now, he would no longer be able to endure. For five years he had assumed that he had lost her love. Now the accumulated flood of it surrounded him. She had served him with gallant patience through great tribulation. She was more his than he had ever dreamed her . . . Even now she clothed herself with humility to speak to him; too delicate, too generous, to

match his sins with hers. The irony, the beauty, of all great love!

"Lucilla! Lucilla!" he murmured, and stretched out his arms.

But Lucilla Lester was no crude servant of passion. She turned, poised for flight either way.

"No, Philip, not even now, if you think me wicked, unworthy." For the first time in five years her features showed all her inward pain.

"Wicked! Unworthy! You? I?" He broke down in trying to phrase it.

She searched his face, and finally found the answer. Then she came to him, without waiting for his words.

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS

"The Nature of an Oath" was first published in *Scribner's Magazine*, August, 1922.

1. In the type of story which Mrs. Gerould usually writes action does not predominate. The conflict does not rage between life and death. The problem of the characters is not the problem of bread and butter. The people of her stories are financially well-to-do and socially secure. Notice the gulf of removal in these respects between the family in "The Nature of an Oath" and the people in "The Fat of the Land" and "Down on Their Knees." Among the group of characters in this story, relieved of the simple and elementary problems of living, there easily arises the tendency to analyze their mental and emotional states. They refuse to take for granted impulses and feelings to which the ordinary man among us gives small attention. Energy is withdrawn from doing and is given to an exposition of conscience. In fiction dealing with such characters, thrilling elements of appeal are not resorted to. The usual devices of this appeal—daring action, the boldly dominating character, and suspense—are absent. Analysis into the deep and subtle impulses of life is, on the other hand, keen and searching. How do the characters in "The Nature of an Oath" differ from the simple-mindedness of Cobbler's Wax,

and how do they conform to the characterization of the Western mind given in that story? (See page 208.)

2. "The Nature of an Oath" analyzes the differences between two sorts of "oaths." Philip Lester was bound to his father by necessity: to save himself from the consequences of a murder. Fear prevented his breaking this oath. Only at the end of the story does Philip learn that a higher oath, the higher oath of love, has all the while bound his wife to him. Characteristically, Lucilla has not expressed this sentiment; nor has he suspected it. Though "The Nature of an Oath" is a love story, it is quite different from what we popularly call a love story, wherein we expect to find sentiment softly, perhaps heroically, expressed.

3. Edward Everett Hale once said that the question which concerned him in story writing was not "How may I tell an interesting story?" but "How may I develop all of the possibilities of an interesting situation?" How does this statement characterize the author's attitude toward the material in "The Nature of an Oath"?

4. Retell the situation at the opening of the story. How is the atmosphere of the whole story struck by the first incident? Does the action begin near the crisis in the lives of the main characters? Is all of the action confined to this crisis? How is the crisis held back? What brings it to the point where it must be met? Why had Mr. Lester got the oath from his son?

5. Give an account of Lucilla's emotional experience. Why is it mentioned that Debussy's music is played, and why is the quotation from Shakespeare put into the mouth of Lester?

6. In what magazines have Mrs. Gerould's stories usually appeared? (Consult the appendixes in O'Brien, Jessup's *American Short Stories*, or the *Cumulative Index to Periodical Literature*.) For what sort of magazine would you think "The Nature of an Oath" not appropriate? Why?

*Suggested Reading.*—"His Sacred Family" by Helen R. Hunt (O. Henry, 1922); *Chance Encounters* by Maxwell Struthers Burt.

*Biographical Note.*—Mrs. Katherine Fullerton Gerould, whose home is at Princeton, New Jersey, is a constant contributor of stories, essays, and verse to contemporary magazines. She has published several volumes of stories and essays and one novel (*Lost Valley*, 1922). She was graduated from Radcliffe College in 1900.

## ALL OR NOTHING\*

CHARLES CALDWELL DOBIE

At Pedro the other two passengers in the Halfmoon Bay bus crawled out and, as the driver shot the car forward, their voices floated back with sharp insistence, "Anson Carr,?" "Yes—you know, the man who came into all that money."

Anson Carr heard the query and answer distinctly, and almost for the first time he realized that he had become a person of importance. The thought both pleased and irritated him. He had always had a craving to stand out from the crowd, to be a person of distinction. He had looked forward to the day when the public would whisper as he passed: "There goes Anson Carr, the famous architect!"

Well, half his dream had come true. At least he was recognized in public places. But he couldn't feel much satisfaction in the circumstances which had pushed him forward. He had the true artist's distaste for money without creative justification, and there was something ironical and humiliating in the fact that what local fame he had achieved had been swamped utterly in the questionable glamour of his new estate. He set his lips together. Well, he would show the public that wealth could be converted into a stepping-stone to something worthy. He would make them forget that he had fallen heir to a large and demoralizing inheritance. And, with a start, he came out of his

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reverie to a realization that he was nearing the spot which had bound up tragedy and good fortune in one swift stroke. Quite as suddenly the man at the wheel leaned back and said:

"The accident happened there—straight ahead where you see the break in the fence. It wasn't the first death on that turn, and it won't be the last."

Anson Carr bent sidewise and looked down at the brush-covered hillside rolling to an abrupt and cruel depth. Instinctively he put his hand upon the shoulder of the driver.

"Let's stop a moment," he suggested.

The man obeyed, reaching for a cigarette. "Did you know them?" he inquired.

"The man was my uncle," Carr finally admitted. And, almost at once, he wondered whether he had made the proper reply.

The driver gave him a look of amazed interest. "Oh, you're the fellow who came into all the money!" he drawled, incredulously. "Live in San Francisco?"

Anson Carr nodded. He knew what the man was thinking—if an interested relation waited months before visiting the scene of tragedy, why come at all? Without further calculation he broke out, apologetically, "I've been away, you see"—in his haste to justify himself, quite ignoring the fact that he had lied shamelessly and to very little purpose.

The driver looked reassured. "They must have been dead a good part of an hour before they were found," he volunteered, with the keen delight of a man called upon for harrowing details. "I never could figure how the guy who saw them lying there ever got the bodies out."

Carr again debated swiftly the expediency of prolonging the topic. "A Greek found them, I believe."

"Yes—one of the trackwalkers for the railroad. He'd come up this way after some fool weed them Greeks use for salad. He don't look so awful husky, but it takes a good man to carry two dead ones up a grade like that and not drag them any, either."

Carr's voice assumed a casual interest. "A trackwalker for the railroad! Then he must live somewhere about here."

The driver started the machine. "I'll show you his place when we get to the top of the hill."

The bus crawled languidly up the grade, gathering speed as its effort became prolonged. Carr leaned back in his seat and gave himself up to fragmentary speculations. Hedged on one side by the tawny bank into which the road ate its sinuous way, and on the other by a monotonous slope of dun-colored chaparral, the landscape lacked interest. Carr was glad of one thing—at least it was a clear day; at this point the usual midsummer fog would have been depressing.

He was still toying fastidiously with his thoughts when the machine came to an abrupt stop. They had reached the summit of the hill and before them a sapphire-blue surge of ocean stretched unbroken to the sky line. A little gasp of astonishment and delight escaped him. It was unusual for the ocean-shore country of Central California to be colored with such tropic splendor.

He was recalled from his momentary ecstasy by the pressure of the driver's fingers against his shoulder. "There," the man was saying, pointing in a direct line below, "in that corrugated-iron shack near the siding—that's where the Greek who found them lives."

Carr looked down. A single and rather forlorn-looking railroad track skirted perilously near the edge of a treacherous cliff; in a jagged curve in the hillside, the sun fell

glistening upon a blue-silver hut lying at the end of a trail beaten through the fragmentary shale of the mountain-side. A thin curl of smoke rose languidly in the amber air. Evidently the Greek was at home.

"I don't think I'll go any farther," declared Carr, somewhat lamely, as he made a movement suggestive of escape. "When does the next bus go back?"

The driver stared incredulously. "About three-thirty from this point. . . . But you never can tell, there may be a full house."

Anson Carr stepped stiffly out upon the oil-blue highway. "I'll risk it!" he said brusquely, with an air of dismissal.

But the man at the wheel was not put out of countenance by any such abrupt leave-taking. Instead of shooting the car forward, he leaned out with irritating assumption as he said:

"If you want any dope, that Greek is the last person in the world to go to. . . . He only understands English when it suits him. . . . And it usually doesn't."

A dull resentment flickered in the suppressed warmth of Carr's retort.

"I'm used to handling Greeks," he flung back, briefly.

The driver shrugged his shoulders and started the bus on its way again.

Anson Carr stood irresolutely before the trail's well-defined source. He did not trust his feet to its treacherous length at once; instead, he squatted Oriental-wise and gazed into the far-flung horizon, across which two full-rigged sailing vessels were crawling with placid patience.

The bus driver had not told Anson Carr anything new. Everybody had said the same thing:

"The Greek won't talk—you can't get anything out of him."

Every time he heard the stock phrase repeated he had

smiled inwardly, framing contemptuous conclusions regarding the trackwalker's stubborn silence. Of course they couldn't get anything out of him! One had to know the breed to set successfully a trap for snaring confidences. If one understood sufficiently, one might read a satisfactory answer to the question put in the very manner it was evaded. A lift of the eyebrows might tell him infinitely more than the clipped directness of a terse eye or nay. And twenty years as an architect handling a fair complement of unskilled labor, in season and out, had given Anson Carr certain avenues of approach to aliens which were obviously closed to others.

As he balanced himself close to the edge of that tawny cliff overlooking the sea, he tried for the hundredth time to analyze the impulse which had drawn him at the eleventh hour toward a more or less futile investigation. He supposed that a less introspective nature would have accepted the Greek's silence and thanked God that it had helped him to a speedy possession of a totally undeserved fortune. His uncle had been nothing to him—indeed, he had felt a violent dislike for him—and his aunt, by the same token, had been equally remote. When Alexander Holman had recouped his squandered fortune by marrying a rich widow from New York, Anson Carr had remarked ironically to his wife:

"Well, at last he's struck a soft berth!"

But on the day news had come that Holman had gone over a bank near Montara, killing himself and his wife instantly, he had not even bothered to report the matter to Nancy. The next morning, as the family was at breakfast the children had pounced upon the story eagerly. He remembered now their morbid curiosity in the details and how it had ruffled him. And how equally irritating had been his wife's:

"I wonder who'll get all the money?"

He had never thought of himself in this connection. His uncle had nothing, and Mrs. Holman's fortune would, of course, go to her people. He had been inclined to scoff when his lawyer had rung him up to make an appointment. But at the end of that interview his attitude of indifference had suffered a distinct change. Not that the lawyer's argument had won him. There were still too many difficulties which a man of sensibilities would shrink from encompassing. But the main facts of the case held potentialities. Alexander Holman and his wife, unless testimony was forthcoming to the contrary, had both met death almost instantly. Failing actual knowledge, the law always assumed that the woman under such circumstances was the first to die. Mrs. Holman had left a will settling every penny on her husband. Anson Carr was his legal heir. The inference was obvious.

Developments had been swift. So far it appeared that he had every legal right to his astounding inheritance. Even Mrs. Holman's sister had admitted that much in a letter that had been dignified to a point of well-bred contempt. . . . Obviously, the lady was not in want, else she would not have been so scornfully indifferent.

When he had wavered a bit his lawyer reassured him with the irrefutable statement that he had just as much right to gather the fruits of chance as the next fellow. But Anson Carr was still a bit in doubt; he wanted to make sure that the dice had been thrown fairly. If he had the rights of chance upon his side, then so did Mrs. Holman's sister. The Greek trackwalker was the only person who could settle the point. And, according to report, the Greek was curiously noncommittal.

Upon the brink of ending all uncertainty, Carr felt the curious reluctance which often confronts a man at the crucial moment.

He rose slowly from his squatting posture, hesitating a moment before he began to descend the jagged path. His weight released bits of shattered rock and set them tumbling downward toward the solitary railroad track. He wondered what whim had raised a dwelling place in this desolate spot. The slopes were without the charity of even a bleached turf, much less a sweep of greensward, and only here and there a golden splash of wild poppies struggled through the stony surface to a belated blossoming. But when he had accomplished the trail's length, a clear and ice-cold drip of water betrayed the reason for choosing such an otherwise forbidding location—a land bitten by summer drought could be scornful of every circumstance save lack of water.

A hard, frugal cleanliness was over everything. The space in front of the open door was swept bare of rock fragments, revealing a tawny and sun-baked sod. At one side, close to the silver dribble of the hill, a little garden had been achieved by the peasant's ardor for contact with the soil. Shallow rows of crisp lettuce, a few darkly green plants of the horse bean, parsley, a savory herb or two—these fruits of primitive tillage made the desolation smile with human homeliness.

Anson Carr stepped into the shadow of the doorway. A fragrant odor of stewing mutton, touched with garlic, gave him a pleasant pang of hunger. He knocked, and, without waiting for an invitation, entered. Fresh as he was from the sun's midday glare, the room's gracious gloom revealed only the dimmest of outlines. He sensed rather than saw the figure of a man spring into dusky life, and quickly he defended his unceremonious entrance with a perfectly worded apology, eschewing the clipped English<sup>1</sup> that would have risen to the lips of the provincial and tact-

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1. *clipped English*, imperfect articulation, especially the dropping of syllables in hurried speech.

less. He was tired and hungry and in a strange bit of country, he explained, and, seeing a house surrounded by a pleasant garden, he had made free to enter. The Greek, snared at once by the challenge to his hospitality, came forward, his thickly clustered hair dipping ceremoniously in a series of sweeping bows. He was cooking a meal—a very poor meal, to be sure—but if the gentleman would honor him. . . .

Anson Carr returned a smiling acceptance. "Mutton and rice?" he half queried. "Only the Greeks know how to cook that dish."

The Greek beamed, flashing white teeth. Had the gentleman been in Greece, by any chance?

Unfortunately, no . . . but at the Minerva Café in San Francisco. . . .

It was not necessary to say anything more. Immediately Anson Carr's swarthy host renewed his sweeping gestures of welcome. His mutton and rice could not be compared to the fare at the Minerva, but such as it was he offered it upon the shrine of hospitality.

The Greek drew a bench out from the table, as he ushered Carr to a seat. When he crossed over to lift the lid from the steaming pot upon the stove, the delicious odors that escaped filled Anson Carr with anticipatory delight. He leaned forward with both elbows on the rude, uncovered table. He was hungry and pleasantly tired, and, so far, quite satisfied with his progress. At least he had established one fact—the Greek's ability to understand and speak English.

Presently a huge plate of mutton stew and rice swimming in a rich gravy and covered with boiled lettuce leaves stood in the center of the table. The Greek poured out two tin cups of water, making a fine gesture of disdain, as he laid one at each place.

It was the very devil itself to get wine these days at any



price, he explained, rather heatedly. For a moment, Anson Carr narrowed his eyes. Why hadn't he thought to bring a quart of claret with him? A moistened tongue always ran along more smoothly. Well, it was too late now, and in default of such assistance he fell back upon the expediency of voicing a racial interest in the man opposite him. The Greek, with that ardor which any and all of his countrymen always brought to a recital of national glories, glowed warmly under the spell of Carr's rapt and provocative silence. Indeed, his lyrical outburst became so swift and vehement that his guest was unable to follow him. But presently, Anson Carr, discovering that the monologue had traveled back to the physical glories of ancient Greece, leaned forward as he said, quite casually:

"The Greeks have always been strong people. . . . The bus driver tells me that you, yourself, carried two dead bodies up a steep hill through the brush without dragging them. Is that the truth?"

For a moment the very atmosphere of the room was darkened by the Greek's swarthy scowl. "Yes," he threw back, "but that is nothing."

Carr broke a thick crust from the round loaf at his elbow. His heart was pounding and his lips had dried with curious suddenness.

"It showed strength, just the same. For my part, I believe I'd have had to drag them . . . They were dead, weren't they—both of them?"

The Greek's displeasure merged swiftly into an impassive mask of unconcern. "How should I know?" he shrugged. "I'm not a doctor."

Anson Carr let out a quick gasp of almost painful relief.

He did not wait for the bus; instead, he decided to walk the track into Pedro and take the train. The Greek's evasive answer to his direct question had been far from

reassuring, and yet he had been glad to escape with the question still unsettled. He was frightened now at the realization of how near he had come to pulling down his house of cards upon his head. He wished he could go home and talk the matter over calmly with his wife. But he knew how futile any discussion would be with Nancy. She had been determined and decisive from the first, putting her argument forward with all the personal bias of motherhood:

"What is Mrs. Holman's sister to you? Why not think of your own for a change?"

Her retort had stung him. It was flavored with a subtle reproach at his inadequacy, which he recognized only too well. He had started his career with high hopes—a yearning to do big things. He had it in him—he felt this, with that curious conviction which pervades artists of any calling. Yet he had allowed expediency to swamp his ambitions. Not that his work had been unworthy, but it had been limited in its scope. He had never had the leisure for magnificent flights. With a brood of fledglings shrilling for their daily keep, it took something more than genius to deny substantial but uninspired commissions. Anson Carr did not regret his family, but only he knew the price he had paid for it. Alone he could have starved and dreamed, and in the end created something lasting. As it was, he had had to be content with mere dreaming. Yet he had managed to achieve one or two distinctly good structures in these later years, modest buildings that had inspired praise which whetted his appetite for greater triumphs. He knew that Nancy had felt something of his struggles, for, finding him still somewhat cold before her maternal arguments, she had finished by saying:

"After all, you can do now what you've always longed to do"—at this point discreetly letting the subject drop.

What he had always longed to do! The realization made him spiritually dizzy. He knew well enough why his creative flights were doomed to endless and futile circlings. He had never, for one thing, had the opportunity to go to the sources of inspiration and drink deeply of their stimulating flow. In the old days, what would he not have given to spend a year, a month, a day, even in the shadow of St. Peter's,<sup>2</sup> or within the walls of the Alhambra,<sup>3</sup> or before the robust and yet misty altar of some Gothic cathedral! How he had longed to go over and steep his soul in the quiet flood of the past, waiting patiently for the rebirth, through him, of some pregnant seed of its beauty! . . . At the beginning he had not been without hopes for such a consummation, but as the years went on taking their toll he had decided that he was fated to taste these joys only vicariously. He was still a young man, and, while his family ties had tethered him, they had not bound his spirit utterly. He could still see visions, although their outlines had been growing dimmer. And, now, fate had put the means in his hand for making all these flagging hopes come true. It would not be a matter of months to be spent among the monumental achievements of the Old World; he could stay for years—forever, if need be. And suddenly he was swept with a feeling of intense weariness, as if his spirit had used up all its reserve energy in the struggle for mere existence. He felt that even if he were to go on turning out unimportant architectural records of his soul's starvation, he would need some respite, some stimulus. Yet, in the face of his exhaustion, he had been foolish enough to tempt fate with almost morbid daring.

He felt that he never again wanted to find himself as

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2. *St. Peter's*, the famous cathedral at Rome, whose dome is one of the most magnificent achievements of architecture.

3. *Alhambra*, the beautiful Moorish palace at Granada, Spain, also an architectural wonder.

shaken as he had been at that moment when he had hung fearfully on the trackwalker's possible revelations. For, somehow, such a crisis tried a man's soul too ruthlessly, and he was beginning to realize how humiliating it was to come too close to one's spiritual nakedness. He ceased to have any wish to be fair. Instead, he felt a sudden and primitive impulse to fight to the last ditch against any and everything that threatened to destroy his belated moment of realization.

The train was delayed by a boulder tumbling across the track from one of the shifting cliffs, and Anson Carr was late for dinner. He decided not to offer an explanation.

"You're sunburnt," his wife observed, with a tone of mild curiosity.

"Yes—I've been out in the open," was his noncommittal reply.

The children were full of tentative and, on the whole, rather expensive plans for the winter. Gladys had decided upon horseback riding three times a week through the park with an exclusive riding club; Bob had been looking over a score of high-power cars; even Ruth, despite her scant twelve years, was voicing ambitions that had the distinct tang of affluence. Nancy sat back and listened, amused and indulgent, secretly pleased that her feathering brood could take the wing with such sweeping confidence. But Anson Carr was annoyed, and, after the children had deserted the table, leaving their parents as usual to dawdle over their black coffee, he said to Nancy, a bit sharply:

"In heaven's name, where do the children get all these expensive notions? I hope you're not encouraging them in such foolishness."

She set her lip with the defensive hardness that he was beginning to know so well.

"Encouraging them!" she echoed. "Surely they have a

right to expect a little something in advance—now that their future is assured.”

“I think their future was pretty well assured in any case. We’ve never been exactly paupers. . . . Besides, nothing is certain. And you’d better tell them so before they have a chance to make fools of themselves.”

“I thought everything was settled.”

“Settled? With the chief witness silent? . . . Nothing is ever settled when a person refuses to go on record. . . . The case might be reopened at any time. . . . As a matter of fact, I’ve been all afternoon trying to get this Greek trackwalker to talk.”

She thrust aside her cup with an impatient gesture. “I should think you’d let well enough alone. First thing you know that man will scent trouble. If you keep picking at him he’s likely to say anything.”

Her heat gave him the cue for a deliberate coolness. “I think he scents trouble now. In fact, he must have suspected something from the first. These Greeks, you know, are chary of legal entanglements. They have an almost Oriental fear. And fear always leads to evasion.”

She followed his explanation with a more tolerant attitude. “Isn’t it more than likely,” she began, cautiously, “that he’s waiting to be convinced?”

“Possible.”

She did not speak at once. There was something awkward and ominous in this pause. She was cutting a design upon the tablecloth with a sharp finger nail when she finally said, almost inaudibly:

“Well, if you were to make it worth his while, perhaps——”

Anson Carr made no reply.

He had a vague feeling that he should have manifested displeasure, but instead he found himself repeating, silently: “So at last it has come to this!”

And he was conscious that his mental exclamation held more of fulfilled expectancy than surprise.

He did not broach the subject to Nancy again. It was as if, having lifted the veil of her reserve, he had a fear of chancing further glimpses. Like every man with ideals, he had clothed the object of his affections in a shimmer of virtue and at this stage he was unwilling to disclose imperfections which his fancy had kept covered. Concerning himself, he was maintaining less and less illusion; that was why it was needful to conserve passionately his illusion in others. For the most part, he kept introspection at arm's length. He was trying to establish the ability to accept the favor of the gods on its face value without undue questioning. The children still talked extravagantly, airing their opulent desires. Sometimes he wondered if their prodigal expectations were not tinged with subtle encouragement from their mother. Doubtless she felt that the more firmly they laid hands upon the future the more difficult would be any attempts to destroy it.

Meanwhile, all the legal entanglements in connection with his inheritance unsnarled with surprising swiftness. The complete, but by no means disturbing, aloofness of Mrs. Holman's sister continued. He began to plan, definitely, now, for his future. He no longer kept his expectations to himself. Instead, he went about with steamship folders and second-hand books of travel. He asked everybody he met about hotels, *pensions*, interesting towns off the beaten track. He found himself expanding like some belated blossom denied its appointed season by a prolonged bleakness. And, as he passed people, in hotel lobbies or cafés, or theater foyers, he heard them whisper his name, saw them stare, glimpsed the mingled admiration and envy in their glances. He was Anson Carr, the man who had come into "all that money." And the public were reacting,



like children, to the glamour of some fairy tale. There were those of his confrères who shook their heads. "He fancies he's going to do big things," they would say. "But of course he won't; it's too late. And, besides, so much money is demoralizing." Others, more friendly, conceded that his opportunity for growth was unlimited. "A man without financial pressure can achieve his desires, not other people's." In short, it was not long before the subject of Anson Carr began to be debated furiously. He became an abstract question. In him a theory remained to be tested. Even the newspapers took him up; architects, actors, painters, writers, clubwomen, were asked to give their opinions as to whether the inheritance of a huge fortune was helpful or inimical to the best traditions of art. He ended by being more apprehensive than annoyed. What, in heaven's name, had possessed him to allow himself to become public property? But, on second thought, he realized that he had accomplished the thing deliberately. Like his children, he was laying firm hands upon the future by flooding the stage so full of light that it would be impossible for him to back off unseen.

Whenever he thought of that terrifying trip to the corrugated-iron shack near the railroad siding he grew cold all over. Thank God, that had ended neutrally! Finally he dismissed the whole thing from his mind. Indeed, he had fancied the issue quite settled when one day, chancing to visit the Greek quarter in search of some unskilled labor for a friendly contractor, whom should he bump into but his Greek trackwalker.

The man halted with a smile of recognition and the usual sweeping bow. He had grown tired of the little hut overlooking the sea, and so he had quit for a week or two. Without quite realizing it, Anson Carr found himself inviting his swarthy friend to join him in a cup of Turkish coffee.

They went into the first coffee-house at hand, and sat



down at one of the marble-topped tables. The room was almost deserted. Carr never remembered seeing one of these Greek coffee-houses so empty, even at this slack hour. The proprietor himself came forward to wait upon them, a melancholy smile upon his face. As he gave the order, Carr remarked the lack of patronage. The proprietor became more and more wistful as he recited his woes. Prohibition had killed everything—even the coffee-houses. When he left to prepare the coffee, the trackwalker took up the lament. He missed his wine, and as for *mastica*<sup>4</sup>—he finished with a gesture of ultimate despair, running his hands through his thick hair tragically. If he had enough money he would leave at once for his native land. Ah yes, Greece was the country of delight. There one could have the fruit of the vine, and people danced upon feast days, and the sunlight was like spun gold.

Anson Carr listened indifferently to his companion's chatter. It was the old lyrical outburst that he knew so well. But when the proprietor broke in upon them with two thick and steaming coffees, he had paused, evidently in polite expectation of a retort.

"So if you had money enough you'd go back home!" The Greek nodded and began to sip his coffee. Anson Carr had a sudden inspiration. "I suppose," he broke out again, "that it wouldn't be possible to get something stronger than coffee here?" The trackwalker stared. "A taste of *mastica*, for instance?"

The man opposite him shrugged with delightful candor.

"One can get nothing without asking," he returned, tranquilly.

Anson Carr beckoned the waiter, who had retreated to his position near the coffee shelf. He answered the signal

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4. *mastica*, a liquor common in the East, usually made from grape-skins and flavored with gum mastic taken from a small evergreen tree found in the Mediterranean regions.

at once. Carr put the question squarely. There followed an animated reply significant with phrases enlarging upon the difficulties of complying with such an outrageous request. Anson Carr listened patiently. At the end he said emphatically:

“Bring us two—and say no more about it.”

The man smiled widely and bustled away. The track-walker let out a low sigh of anticipation.

The mastica had been diluted, there was no doubt of that, but it still had the power to quicken both the pulse and the imagination. Under its influence the Greek grew more and more talkative and Anson Carr more and more retrospective. The taste of this colorless aric-flavored stimulant revived in Carr the memory of days when the quarter had been warmed to racial geniality by this national drink. Then the coffee-houses had been crowded, and men had danced together their old ceremonial dances and sipped their coffee with much jesting and a good deal of laughter.

In those days he had come down frequently just for relaxation. And somehow he had always gone away refreshed by the naïveté of it all. He found himself vaguely speculating whether he would go away refreshed in this instance, and, noticing that his guest had finished his mastica in one final gulp of satisfaction, he ordered another. The trackwalker began to talk with even greater insistence: This was the life . . . something to drink . . . friends to talk to . . . nothing to do! How lonesome he had been on that railroad siding with the sea forever making ominous noises! He was not accustomed to the sea; he was from the mountain . . . A sheep herder? Yes, in his youth . . . No, shepherding was not a lonely life . . . One had dogs and lambs and the birds of the forest for company . . . There were birds along the California shore, of course, screaming, melancholy

things of no account. . . . The sea lapping the sands of Greece? Ah, that was different! Not cold and gray and forbidding at any time. No, if one could believe it, the sea in that favored spot was always a thing of sky-blue and gold.

Anson Carr found himself intrigued and carried away by the exile's lament. He had a wish that the man would continue to talk of nothing but his native land . . . he wanted to escape with him into a rosy-flushed horizon of dreams. But presently the Greek's background shifted, for contrast, undoubtedly. He came back with a pull to the corrugated-iron hut along the edge of the Pacific. It had been lonely, he reiterated. For days he would talk to no one. . . . Of course, immediately after the accident—

"The accident?" Anson Carr found himself echoing with a strange terror.

Yes, the accident . . . two people killed. Didn't the gentleman remember? Well, after that, for a season crowds of people had swarmed in on him, asking all sorts of questions. But he had been wise. He had refused to answer anybody. . . . That was right, wasn't it . . . after an accident to do no talking? . . . The law was a crafty matter. . . . If one kept one's mouth shut things soon mended, but if one talked . . . well, in that case anything was possible. . . . He had a countryman once who went into a lonely hut in the mountains and found a man dying . . . and, would you believe it? they tried to prove that this countryman had committed a murder. Yes, and all because the man had talked, in his excitement, stating things that were afterwards proved to be untrue. . . . Not that the man had lied, but at such times one does not always see correctly—one imagines things. . . . Ah, but he had profited by this countryman's experience! and when people had come, asking him

slyly certain questions, he had either shrugged his shoulders or returned a meaningless answer.

"Questions. What sort of questions?" Anson Carr put in, deftly.

"They always asked the same thing, my friend—which had died first, the man or the woman."

For a moment Anson Carr was distracted by the audible buzzing of a fly hovering just above his coffee cup. He waved the intruder away as he leaned forward with confidential air of comradeship and said, point-blank:

"And who did die first? I'm curious, too."

The Greek trackwalker smiled cryptically. "I could answer that if I wanted to. . . . Well, maybe I will. We are good friends, eh? What do you say?"

Anson Carr felt his heart sink suddenly. He had an impulse to rise and leave at once, but instead he found himself replying:

"Wait . . . After we've had another drink!" And with that the proprietor came forward, carrying two deceitful black coffee cups on a tray.

He speculated, afterwards, as he set his course toward home, what perversity tempted men to stir up the pools of content? Why could not one accept the crystal clearness of still water instead of taking issue with its slimy bed? Was there really something fundamental in both physical and spiritual existence at odds with serenity? Something which drove a man on and on, from one disillusionment to another, toward the ultimate resignation? Was life a perpetual Bluebeard's chamber,<sup>5</sup> luring the curious to destruction with the snare of a closed door? He wondered what Nancy would say—would think. Should he take her into

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5. *Bluebeard's chamber*, the room in which the well-known character of fiction, Bluebeard, concealed the bodies of his murdered wives.

his confidence? Nowadays he had a sort of terror in her presence, realizing that he was no match for her—that no male was a match for any female defending the claims of her progeny. He knew that his part in the problem had ceased to move her. She merely traded on his desires, to achieve a desirable end for her children. When he enlarged upon the glories of his future she smiled tolerantly. He had a feeling that, in the end, she would be content to let him ramble off and dream alone.

He found her helping the Japanese servant clear away evidences of an informal tea-table. She had stripped the garden of its riot of dahlias and the room quite glowed with their flamboyant color. It was a pleasant room, Anson Carr found himself admitting, even if it was of his own designing. He dropped into a seat beside the silver tea urn. He was glad to be back in the delightfully screened interior. It was full of little intimate revelations, which seemed to sum up, in their quiet and orderly beauty, the complete history of his married life.

"Ah, this is good, after all! . . . It would be hard to improve on this room, Nancy. We've done well with it, and no mistake."

She was still glowing warmly with the animated intimacies of the tea hour, and her manner was almost brilliant as she threw back:

"Oh, this is nothing. Wait till you see what we can do with a real background!"

For the first time it came to him that already Nancy was planning to abandon her present environment for something more impressive. The realization wounded him. This home had been the one free and perfect expression of his creative power. It lacked magnificence, but it was filled with an unhampered sincerity.

"What better could anyone want than this?" he demanded.

She met his challenge with an indulgent laugh.

"I'll show you, some day," she retorted. "You've no idea how much money can buy."

"Money!" he sneered.

She misread his contempt. "You must be tired," she suggested. "Better let me make you a cup of tea."

He made a gesture of refusal. "I've been drinking coffee all afternoon."

"Coffee? How absurd! No wonder you're all on edge."

"Well, there was something stronger, too. I was looking up some men for trackwalkers. We went into a café for Turkish coffee . . . we ended by drinking masticas. He talked me into a headache."

She sat down opposite him, brushing aside a golden shower of pollen which had scattered from one of the bouquets upon the shining surface of the center table.

"Did you learn anything . . . new?"

He turned upon her with a curious impulse to wound. "Nothing but what I've expected. . . . She was alive when he found them . . ."

There followed an interval of portentous silence, broken by the sound of Carr's cigarette holder tapping against the arm of his chair.

"Ah," floated toward him finally, upon a breath painfully released, "then we are in his hands, after all. . . . Can't you persuade him to go away?"

He lit a match wearily. "He's going back . . . to Greece. We settled that question before I left him."

"Does he suspect?"

"One never can be sure—with a peasant. . . . But a man with wits usually knows from which quarter the wind blows." She rose with a nervous movement, releasing her disquiet in a trivial rearrangement of the dahlias. It was not until her back was turned that he gathered courage for the next thrust.

"I'll see my lawyer in the morning."

She faced him swiftly. "Surely you're not going to be fool enough to tell him!"

"Not that, at any rate. But it's only decent to offer Mrs. Holman's sister something . . . now."

"Why?"

"Why! In God's name, what would you have me do?"

She met the thrust with a quick mental side-step. "The man may be lying."

"That isn't likely."

"And, besides, a compromise might arouse her suspicions. Next thing she'll come flying out here. If she offers that Greek more, he'll stay."

He left his seat deliberately. "No, she wouldn't stoop to that. Her letters prove she isn't that kind of woman."

She gave a defiant toss of her head.

"Well, if I were you, I know what I'd do—I'd make up my mind to take it all or nothing."

He folded his arms with an air of insolent tolerance. "And, being yourself, what then?"

She looked at him squarely. "Being myself, I wouldn't yield up one penny . . . Mrs. Holman's sister is nothing to me."

He swept her from head to foot with an appraising glance. Curiously enough, her words did not shock him. Instead, he was forced into grudging admiration. She had the courage of her maternal ruthlessness, at all events.

He was sure that Nancy's all-or-nothing theory had been a matter of sheer bravado, one of those magnificent gestures which a cornered antagonist makes in the hope of confusing an adversary. Nevertheless, the logic was irrefutable. Even insincerity could not disguise the inherent soundness of such a position. Yet, in spite of his convic-



tion he saw his lawyer and the offer was made. He felt an enormous relief. Somehow, he had a vague feeling that an acceptance of his terms would divide the responsibility—that, by yielding to a compromise, Mrs. Holman's sister would become party to his duplicity. But beneath the surface of his content lurked a latent apprehension. He decided to leave as few loopholes for wavering as possible. He announced that he would not wait until spring to accomplish his long-deferred pilgrimage to the shrines of his art. He was going at once. As he suspected, Nancy begged for a postponement, so far as she was concerned. There were the children, and—he merely shrugged his shoulders and went and arranged transportation for himself.

He was kept very busy, for he soon discovered that he had the departure of the Greek trackwalker to accomplish. When he first had made the offer it had seemed the simplest thing imaginable—a certain sum forthcoming and that would be the end of it. But at once complications arose, matters of a passport and all the awkward questions which conditions abroad at this time raised. Hardly a day passed when the Greek was not hovering about his office with obsequious patience: he wanted to give no offense and be of the least trouble in the world, but if Mr. Carr would spare a few moments to go with him to the Greek consul, they could at once settle such and such an issue. Or he required some sort of letter of credit and would his patron mind introducing him to his banker? Or there was need of witnesses to the fact that he was born thus and so. What was to be done about it? All this might have been tolerable had the trackwalker been content to allow Anson Carr to pose merely as an adviser, but he seemed to take an almost diabolical joy in proclaiming relationship. This American was his patron, an astounding man, truly, who was making him a present of a ticket home just out of pure

love and affection. And in the presence of any and all of his countrymen he would embrace Anson Carr fervently and with embarrassing ardor. Carr remonstrated. It was not necessary to proclaim the news from the house-tops—he did not care to have his generosity become public property. But he merely wasted breath. By way of answer, his protégé made a series of sweeping bows and declared that it was not the custom of his country to hide the light of a friend's worthiness under a bushel. Of what profit was virtue if its praise remained unsung?

All this was tiresome enough when performed before an audience composed of strangers, and Anson Carr fell to wondering if some day the circle of auditors would not widen to include an acquaintance or even an intimate. And almost before the speculation had escaped him the fear was realized. The Greek, breaking hastily into the office one day, had found Carr coming out the door in company with his lawyer. It was useless to stem the tide of speech which overwhelmed them in a lyrical flood. Everything was finally settled and on Monday he was to start home—the ticket bought and all the other tiresome tangles unknotted. And on Saturday afternoon a great feast at the corrugated-iron shack near the ocean, an *al fresco*<sup>6</sup> affair, with a whole sheep roasted, and Greek music and shepherd dancing. He had come to make certain that his worthy patron would be there—he was consumed with a desire to present such a paragon of generosity to his countrymen. And here he turned to Anson Carr's lawyer: Fancy a man out of sheer compassion providing the means for homeward flight to a stranger sorrowing for his native land!

Carr dismissed the man with a rather curt acceptance of the invitation. To have refused would have led to a string of irritating protests. Was the Greek simple, or extraordinarily profound?

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6. *al fresco*, out-of-doors (literally, in the cool air).

He came from the haze of this idle speculation into the casual significance of his lawyer's query:

"That's the man who pulled Mr. and Mrs. Holman out of the wreck, isn't it?"

He fumbled a bit mentally, deciding in the end to chance a discreet frankness. "Yes. . . . I think, everything considered, that the best place for him is home!" And, finding his lawyer disturbingly noncommittal, he was forced to hide his uneasiness behind an empty and cynical laugh.

He had no heart for the trackwalker's celebration, but it seemed best to go through with the ordeal. As he expected, he was the center of attraction, barring the roasted sheep and the thin dribbles of smuggled wine enlivening the occasion. There was a Homeric quality to the feast, and the sun came out of a dun-colored mist to warm the sea into Hellenic<sup>7</sup> splendor. Under ordinary circumstances Anson Carr would have been completely captivated—at the feasting, at the rhythmic wailings of the violin and piccolo, at the long line of men dancing with alternate solemnity and abandon. He was a man who welcomed escapes from the commonplace, but how was one to escape into even an external beauty with the fiction of a questionable worthiness dinning constantly into one's ears? At the beginning he had taken the trackwalker aside and said:

"Cut me out. Do you understand? . . . I mean, let us have no more of this praise. . . . Say nothing of my hand in all this."

To which his faithful friend had raised indescribably mournful eyes in protest. "But consider—this feast is not for me, my friend! It is in your honor. We must say something of our patron."

Further protest was useless. He had to smile through

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7. *Hellenic*, Grecian.

all the encomiums that were heaped upon him. Even granting the Oriental extravagance of their words, he began to sense that these men did think him an open-handed benefactor who distributed his boons with a regal contempt for self-interest. To them he was a bit of poetry made life—a reincarnation of those enchanted days when the gods stalked abroad and let their favors fall where and upon whom they would. Even the trackwalker shared his countrymen's illusion. Anson Carr could see that now only too plainly. And, somehow, he felt humiliated by the emptiness of his triumph. He was like a pretender raised upon a throne, knowing himself the falseness of his claim.

He got away from it all as quickly as possible. In the hope that he might have a few moments of solitude, he had scorned flagging the train at the siding, insisting that he wished to walk into Pedro instead. Walk? He, their benefactor? No, it was not to be thought of! Instead, they carried him in triumph on their shoulders, with the piccolo player in advance. Thus had he entered the village with children and all the curious trooping out to join in the festivity. And in the midst of it all the trackwalker, standing upon the mail truck, saying in a loud voice:

“You cannot think what this man has done. . . . For pure love and affection he pays my way home to my native land. . . . Yes, for love and nothing else. What have you to say to that?”

And the train pulling in, he was put to the further embarrassment of embraces from all the company and kisses implanted on either cheek in brotherly and Christian salutation.

Once seated, he leaned out of the car window, answering their farewell shouts with as eloquent a gesture as he could muster. . . . A sense of humiliation engulfed him again. If the Greek had only suspected, how much easier it would have been! Was it possible that he was to

tread the path of self-contempt alone? . . . Well, there was at least Mrs. Holman's sister. With cynical delight he turned his thoughts from the stale and unprofitable afternoon. To tug at his adversary's patronizing inflexibility with all the strength of compromise gave him a curious satisfaction. Pulling himself back to the heights was too great an effort. At this point it seemed easier to drag another down. He began to speculate about the exact date of his sailing. He was glad Nancy had decided to wait. He wanted to be alone with his dreams—*utterly alone!* He had never realized before how greatly he had longed for freedom.

He was late again for dinner, but this time Nancy met him in the hallway. She had an envelope in her hand.

"Where have you been?" she challenged, moving toward him nervously.

"The Greek had a farewell. It was absurd, of course, my going, but there are some things one can't escape. . . . He leaves tomorrow."

Her face glowed with a warm relief. "Ah, then that's settled! . . . . They've been trying to get hold of you. Word has come, I believe from Mrs. Holman's sister. I suggested they send the letter here. A boy brought it an hour or so ago."

"What did it say?"

"I haven't opened it."

He took the envelope from her. She retreated to the empty fireplace, resting one hand upon the mantel as she watched him. He read it through, measuring every word. When he had finished he turned a chill smile in her direction as he said, sneeringly:

"As usual, she declines all compromise . . . . She won't even give us the satisfaction of a fight . . . . She has your idea—*all or nothing!*"

Her hand fell to her side. "Just the same, it's well that the Greek is going home," she retorted, with a shade of malice. "By the way, when do *you sail?*"

He stared at her for an eternity, and at that moment every beautiful thing that he had ever dreamed passed before his eyes and mocked him.

"I guess that's all over now," he heard himself say.

She came over to him swiftly, shaking him, as she might have shaken a child who had frightened her.

"What's the matter with you?" she almost shouted. "You can't mean that you intend to offer her *everything?*"

He tossed the envelope from him with a gesture of weariness. "Everything but my self-respect," he answered.

And, in a flash, he felt himself at once pitiful and triumphant—victorious, yet savorless—touched with a tragic but pallid splendor, alone in his white-bled glory.

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS

"All or Nothing" was first published in *Harper's Magazine*, July, 1921.

1. The conflict in "All or Nothing" lies in the temperament of the main character. Anson Carr fights within himself the battle of what he considers right against what he considers wrong. A nature less sensitive than his would have accepted the inheritance which had fallen to him without inquiring whether it was rightly his or not. But since Carr is the man he is, he cannot let the question rest. Yet he hesitates. He, too, is somewhat afraid of the truth. Indeed, he goes to pains to suppress the only source of evidence which might deprive him of his great fortune. His motives are not simple. The suspense of the story is produced by following the play of these conflicting motives within him.

The sentence, "He was trying to establish the ability to accept the favor of the gods on its face value without undue question-

ing" (page 290), represents the struggle which drives him finally to learn the truth, no matter what it costs him. This struggle produces the crisis in his life.

2. This struggle is added to by the conflict which exists between Carr's ambition as an artist and the demands of his family life. Notice the difference in the directions of his and his wife's ambitions. A strong contrast is also presented between the child-like acceptance of all the events of life by the Greek and the intense concern with moral distinctions which burdens Carr's mind.

3. Outline the various motives which moved Carr's actions. What did he most greatly desire to do? What predominates in the story—plot, character, or theme? What is the meaning of the title, "All or Nothing"?

4. Why did Mrs. Holman refuse Carr's offer of a part of the fortune? Why did Carr decide to offer her the whole fortune? Do you think he did right to make the offer? Discuss. Why did Carr feel triumphant at the end? Is the ending convincing?

5. Upon what legal point does the story depend? Where does the suspense begin? Is your interest in finding out which of the two victims of the automobile accident died first or in the effect the discovery will have upon Carr?

*Suggested Reading.*—"Each in His Generation" by M. S. Burt (O. Henry, 1920); "The Belled Buzzard" by Irvin Cobb (in *The Saturday Evening Post* for September 7, 1912; also in *American Short Stories*, edited by Jessup).

*Biographical Note.*—Charles C. Dobie is a resident of San Francisco, where he was born in 1881. He was engaged in the insurance business until 1916. His first short story was published in the *Argonaut* in 1910, and his first novel, *Blood Red Dawn*, in 1920.



## FOOTFALLS\*

WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

This is not an easy story; not a road for tender feet or for casual feet. Better the meadows. Let me warn you, it is as hard as that old man's soul and as sunless as his eyes. It has its inception in catastrophe, and its end in an almost incredible act of violence; between them it tells barely how one, long blind, can become also deaf and dumb.

He lived in one of those old Puritan sea towns where the strain has come down austere and moribund, so that his act would not be quite unbelievable. Except that the town is no longer Puritan and Yankee. It has been betrayed; it has become an outpost of the Portuguese islands.

This man, the blind cobbler himself, was Portuguese from St. Michael, in the Western Islands, and his name was Boaz Negro.

He was happy. An unquenchable exuberance lived in him. When he arose in the morning he made vast, as it were uncontrollable, gestures with his stout arms. He came into his shop singing. His voice, strong and deep as the chest from which it emanated, rolled out through the doorway and along the street, and the fishermen, done with their morning work and lounging and smoking along the wharves, said, "Boaz is to work already." Then they came up to sit in the shop.

In that town a cobbler's shop is a club. One sees the interior always dimly thronged. They sit on the benches

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watching the artisan at his work for hours, and they talk about everything in the world. A cobbler is known by the company he keeps.

Boaz Negro kept young company. He would have nothing to do with the old. On his own head the gray hairs set thickly.

He had a grown son. But the benches in his shop were for the lusty and valiant young, men who could spend the night drinking, and then at three o'clock in the morning turn out in the rain and dark to pull at the weirs, sing songs, buffet one another among the slippery fish in the boat's bottom, and make loud jokes about the fundamental things, love and birth and death. Harkening to their boasts and strong prophecies his breast heaved and his heart beat faster. He was a large, full-blooded fellow, fashioned for exploits; the flame in his darkness burned higher even to hear of them.

It is scarcely conceivable how Boaz Negro could have come through this much of his life still possessed of that unquenchable and priceless exuberance; how he would sing in the dawn; how, simply listening to the recital of deeds in gale or brawl, he could easily forget himself, a blind man, tied to a shop and a last; easily make of himself a lusty young fellow breasting the sunlit and adventurous tide of life.

He had had a wife, whom he had loved. Fate, which had scourged him with the initial scourge of blindness, had seen fit to take his Angelina away. He had four sons. Three, one after another, had been removed, leaving only Manuel, the youngest. Recovering slowly, with agony, from each of these recurrent blows, his unquenchable exuberance had lived. And there was another thing quite as extraordinary. He had never done anything but work, and that sort of thing may kill the flame where an abrupt

catastrophe fails. Work in the dark. Work, work, work! And accompanied by privation; an almost miserly scale of personal economy. Yes, indeed, he had "skinned his fingers," especially in the earlier years. When it tells most.

How he had worked! Not alone in the daytime, but also sometimes, when orders were heavy, far into the night. It was strange for one, passing along that deserted street at midnight, to hear issuing from the black shop of Boaz Negro the rhythmical tap-tap-tap of hammer on wooden peg.

Nor was that sound all: no man in town could get far past that shop in his nocturnal wandering unobserved. No more than a dozen footfalls, and from the darkness Boaz's voice rolled forth, fraternal, stentorian, "Good-night, Antone!" "Good-night to you, Caleb Snow!"

To Boaz Negro it was still broad day.

Now, because of this, he was what might be called a substantial man. He owned his place, his shop, opening on the sidewalk, and behind it the dwelling-house with trellised galleries upstairs and down.

And there was always something for his son, a "piece for the pocket," a dollar-, five-, or even a ten-dollar bill if he had "got to have it." Manuel was a "good boy." Boaz not only said this; he felt that he was assured of it in his understanding, to the infinite peace of his heart.

It was curious that he should be ignorant only of the one nearest to him. Not because he was physically blind. Be certain he knew more of other men and of other men's sons than they or their neighbors did. More, that is to say, of their hearts and understandings, their idiosyncrasies, and their ultimate weight in the balance-pan of eternity.

His simple explanation of Manuel was that Manuel "wasn't too stout." To others he said this, and to himself.

Manuel was not indeed too robust. How should he be vigorous when he never did anything to make him so? He never worked. Why should he work, when existence was provided for, and when there was always that "piece for the pocket"? Even a ten-dollar bill on a Saturday night! No, Manuel "wasn't too stout."

In the shop they let it go at that. The missteps and frailties of everyone else in the world were canvassed there with the most shameless publicity. But Boaz Negro was a blind man, and in a sense their host. Those reckless, strong young fellows respected and loved him. It was allowed to stand at that. Manuel was "a good boy." Which did not prevent them, by the way, from joining later in the general condemnation of that father's laxity—"the ruination of the boy!"

"He should have put him to work, that's what."

"He should have said to Manuel, 'Look here, if you want a dollar, go earn it first.'"

As a matter of fact, only one man ever gave Boaz the advice direct. That was Campbell Wood. And Wood never sat in that shop.

In every small town there is one young man who is spoken of as "rising." As often as not he is not a native, but "from away."

In this town Campbell Wood was that man. He had come from another part of the state to take a place in the bank. He lived in the upper story of Boaz Negro's house, the ground floor now doing for Boaz and the meager remnant of his family. The old woman who came in to tidy up for the cobbler looked after Wood's rooms as well.

Dealing with Wood, one had first of all the sense of his incorruptibility. A little ruthless perhaps, as if one could imagine him, in defense of his integrity, cutting off his friend, cutting off his own hand, cutting off the very stream

flowing out from the wellsprings of human kindness. An exaggeration, perhaps.

He was by long odds the most eligible young man in town; good looking in a spare, ruddy, sandy-haired Scottish fashion; important, incorruptible, "rising." But he took good care of his heart. Precisely that; like a sharp-eyed duenna to his own heart. One felt that here was the man, if ever was the man, who held his destiny in his own hand. Failing, of course, some quite gratuitous and unforeseeable catastrophe.

Not that he was not human, or even incapable of laughter or passion. He was, in a way, immensely accessible. He never clapped one on the shoulder; on the other hand, he never failed to speak. Not even to Boaz.

Returning from the bank in the afternoon, he had always a word for the cobbler. Passing out again to supper at his boarding-place, he had another, about the weather, the prospects of rain. And if Boaz were at work in the dark when he returned from an evening at the Board of Trade, there was a "Good-night, Mr. Negro!"

On Boaz's part, his attitude toward his lodger was curious and paradoxical. He did not pretend to anything less than reverence for the young man's position; precisely on account of that position he was conscious toward Wood of a vague distrust. This was because he was an uneducated fellow.

To the uneducated the idea of large finance is as uncomfortable as the idea of the law. It must be said for Boaz that, responsive to Wood's unfailing civility, he fought against this sensation of dim and somehow shameful distrust. Nevertheless his whole parental soul was in arms that evening, when, returning from the bank and finding the shop empty of loungers, Wood paused a moment to propose the bit of advice already referred to.

"Haven't you ever thought of having Manuel learn the trade?"

A suspicion, a kind of presumption, lighted the fires of defense.

"Shoemaking," said Boaz, "is good enough for a blind man."

"Oh, I don't know. At least it's better than doing nothing at all."

Boaz's hammer was still. He sat silent, monumental. Outwardly. For once his unfailing response had failed him, "Manuel ain't too stout, you know." Perhaps it had become suddenly inadequate.

He hated Wood; he despised Wood; more than ever before, a hundredfold more, quite abruptly, he distrusted Wood.

How could a man say such things as Wood had said? And where Manuel himself might hear!

Where Manuel *had* heard! Boaz's other emotions—hatred and contempt and distrust—were overshadowed. Sitting in darkness, no sound had come to his ears, no footfall, no infinitesimal creaking of the floor-plank. Yet by some sixth uncanny sense of the blind he was aware that Manuel was standing in the dusk of the entry joining the shop to the house.

Boaz made a Herculean effort. The voice came out of his throat, harsh, bitter, and loud enough to have carried ten times the distance to his son's ears.

"Manuel is a good boy!"

"Yes—h'm—yes—I suppose so."

Wood shifted his weight. He seemed uncomfortable.

"Well. I'll be running along, I—ugh! Heavens!"

Something was happening. Boaz heard exclamations, breathings, the rustle of sleeve-cloth in large, frantic, and futile graspings—all without understanding. Immediately

there was an impact on the floor, and with it the unmistakable clink of metal. Boaz even heard that the metal was minted, and that the coins were gold. He understood. A coin-sack, gripped not quite carefully enough for a moment under the other's overcoat, had shifted, slipped, escaped, and fallen.

And Manuel had heard!

It was a dreadful moment for Boaz, dreadful in its native sense, as full of dread. Why? It was a moment of horrid revelation, ruthless clarification. His son, his link with the departed Angelina, that "good boy"—Manuel, standing in the shadow of the entry, visible alone to the blind, had heard the clink of falling gold, and—and *Boaz wished that he had not!*

There, amazing, disconcerting, destroying, stood the sudden fact.

Sitting as impassive and monumental as ever, his strong, bleached hands at rest on his work, round drops of sweat came out on Boaz's forehead. He scarcely took the sense of what Wood was saying. Only fragments.

"Government money, understand—for the breakwater workings—huge—too many people know here, everywhere—don't trust the safe—tin safe—'Noah's Ark'—give you my word—Heavens, no!"

It boiled down to this—the money, more money than was good for that antiquated "Noah's Ark" at the bank—and whose contemplated sojourn there overnight was public to too many minds—in short, Wood was not only incorruptible; he was canny. To what one of those minds, now, would it occur that he should take away that money bodily, under casual cover of his coat, to his own lodgings behind the cobbler-shop of Boaz Negro? For this one, this important night!

He was sorry the coin-sack had slipped, because he did



not like to have the responsibility of secret sharer cast upon anyone, even upon Boaz, even by accident. On the other hand, how tremendously fortunate that it had been Boaz and not another. So far as that went, Wood had no more anxiety now than before. One incorruptible knows another.

"I'd trust you, Mr. Negro" (that was one of the fragments which came and stuck in the cobbler's brain), "as far as I would myself. As long as it's only you. I'm just going up here and throw it under the bed. Oh, yes, certainly."

Boaz ate no supper. For the first time in his life food was dry in his gullet. Even under those other successive crushing blows of Fate the full and generous habit of his functionings had carried on unabated; he had always eaten what was set before him. Tonight, over his untouched plate, he watched Manuel with the sightless eyes, keeping track of his every mouthful, word, intonation, breath. What profit he expected to extract from this catlike surveillance it is impossible to say.

When they arose from the supper-table Boaz made another Herculean effort.

"Manuel, you're a good boy!"

The formula had a quality of appeal, of despair, and of command.

"Manuel, you should be short of money, maybe. Look, what's this? A tenner? Well, there's a piece for the pocket; go and enjoy yourself."

He would have been frightened had Manuel, upsetting tradition, declined the offering. With the morbid contrariness of the human imagination, the boy's avid grasping gave him no comfort.

He went out into the shop, where it was already dark, drew to him his last, his tools, mallets, cutters, pegs, leather. And having prepared to work, he remained idle. He found himself listening.

It has been observed that the large phenomena of sunlight and darkness were nothing to Boaz Negro. A busy night was broad day. Yet there was a difference; he knew it with the blind man's eyes, the ears.

Day was a vast confusion, or rather a wide fabric, of sounds; great and little sounds all woven together, voices, footfalls, wheels, far-off whistles and foghorns, flies buzzing in the sun. Night was another thing. Still there were voices and footfalls, but rarer, emerging from the large, pure body of silence as definite, surprising, and yet familiar entities.

Tonight there was an easterly wind, coming off the water and carrying the sound of waves. So far as other fugitive sounds were concerned it was the same as silence. The wind made little to the ears. It nullified, from one direction at least, the other two visual processes of the blind, the sense of touch and the sense of smell. It blew away from the shop, toward the living-house.

As has been said, Boaz found himself listening, scrutinizing with an extraordinary attention, this immense background of sound. He heard footfalls. The story of that night was written, for him, in footfalls.

He heard them moving about the house, the lower floor, prowling here, there, halting for long spaces, advancing, retreating softly on the planks. About this aimless, interminable perambulation there was something to twist the nerves, something led and at the same time driven like a succession of frail and indecisive charges.

Boaz lifted himself from his chair. All his impulse called him to make a stir, join battle, cast in the breach the reinforcement of his presence, authority, good will. He sank back again; his hands fell down. The curious impotence of the spectator held him.

He heard footfalls, too, on the upper floor, a little

fainter, borne to the inner rather than the outer ear, along the solid causeway of partitions and floor, the legs of his chair, the bony framework of his body. Very faint indeed. Sinking back easily into the background of the wind. They, too, came and went, this room, that, to the passage, the stair-head, and away. About them, too, there was the same quality of being led and at the same time of being driven.

Time went by. In his darkness it seemed to Boaz that hours must have passed. He heard voices. Together with the footfalls, that abrupt, brief, and (in view of Wood's position) astounding interchange of sentences made up his history of the night. Wood must have opened the door at the head of the stair; by the sound of his voice he would be standing there, peering below perhaps; perhaps listening.

"What's wrong down there?" he called. "Why don't you go to bed?"

After a moment, came Manuel's voice, "Ain't sleepy."

"Neither am I. Look here, do you like to play cards?"

"What kind? Euchre! I like euchre all right. Or pitch."

"Well, what would you say to coming up and having a game of euchre then, Manuel? If you can't sleep?"

"That'd be all right."

The lower footfalls ascended to join the footfalls on the upper floor. There was the sound of a door closing.

Boaz sat still. In the gloom he might have been taken for a piece of furniture, of machinery, an extraordinary lay figure, perhaps, for the trying on of the boots he made. He seemed scarcely to breathe, only the sweat starting from his brow giving him an aspect of life.

He ought to have run, and leaped up that inner stair and pounded with his fists on that door. He seemed unable to move. At rare intervals feet passed on the sidewalk outside, just at his elbow, so to say, and yet somehow, tonight,

immeasurably far away. Beyond the orbit of the moon. He heard Rugg, the policeman, noting the silence of the shop, muttering, "Boaz is to bed tonight," as he passed.

The wind increased. It poured against the shop with its deep, continuous sound of a river. Submerged in its body, Boaz caught the note of the town bell striking midnight.

Once more, after a long time, he heard footfalls. He heard them coming around the corner of the shop from the house, footfalls half swallowed by the wind, passing discreetly, without haste, retreating, merging step by step with the huge, incessant background of the wind.

Boaz's muscles tightened all over him. He had the impulse to start up, to fling open the door, shout into the night, "What are you doing? Stop there! Say! What are you doing and where are you going?"

And as before, the curious impotence of the spectator held him motionless. He had not stirred in his chair. And those footfalls, upon which hinged, as it were, that momentous decade of his life, were gone.

There was nothing to listen for now. Yet he continued to listen. Once or twice, half arousing himself, he drew toward him his unfinished work. And then relapsed into immobility.

As has been said, the wind, making little difference to the ears, made all the difference in the world with the sense of feeling and the sense of smell. From the one important direction of the house. That is how it could come about that Boaz Negro could sit, waiting and listening to nothing in the shop and remain ignorant of disaster until the alarm had gone and come back again, pounding, shouting, clanging.

"*Fire!*" he heard them bawling in the street. "*Fire! Fire!*"

Only slowly did he understand that the fire was in his own house.

There is nothing stiller in the world than the skeleton of a house in the dawn after a fire. It is as if everything living, positive, violent, had been completely drained in the one flaming act of violence, leaving nothing but negation till the end of time. It is worse than a tomb. A monstrous stillness! Even the footfalls of the searchers cannot disturb it, for they are separate and superficial. In its presence they are almost frivolous.

Half an hour after dawn the searchers found the body, if what was left from that consuming ordeal might be called a body. The discovery came as a shock. It seemed incredible that the occupant of that house, no cripple or invalid but an able man in the prime of youth, should not have awakened and made good his escape. It was the upper floor which had caught; the stairs had stood to the last. It was beyond calculation, even if he had been asleep!

And he had not been asleep. This second and infinitely more appalling discovery began to be known. Slowly. By a hint, a breath of rumor here; there an allusion, half taken back. The man, whose incinerated body still lay curled in its bed of cinders, had been dressed at the moment of disaster; even to the watch, the cuff-buttons, the studs, the very scarf-pin. Fully clothed to the last detail, precisely as those who had dealings at the bank might have seen Campbell Wood any week-day morning for the past eight months. A man does not sleep with his clothes on. The skull of the man had been broken, as if with a blunt instrument of iron. On the charred lacework of the floor lay the leg of an old andiron with which Boaz Negro and his Angelina had set up housekeeping in that new house.

It needed only Mr. Asa Whitelaw, coming up the street from that gaping "Noah's Ark" at the bank, to round out the scandalous circle of circumstance.

"Where is Manuel?"

Boaz Negro still sat in his shop, impassive, monumental,

his thick, hairy arms resting on the arms of his chair. The tools and materials of his work remained scattered about him, as his irresolute gathering of the night before had left them. Into his eyes no change could come. He had lost his house, the visible monument of all those years of "skinning his fingers." It would seem that he had lost his son. And he had lost something incalculably precious—that hitherto unquenchable exuberance of the man.

"Where is Manuel?"

When he spoke his voice was unaccented and stale, like the voice of a man already dead.

"Yes, where is Manuel?"

He had answered them with their own question.

"When did you last see him?"

Neither he nor they seemed to take note of that profound irony. "At supper."

"Tell us, Boaz; you knew about this money?"

The cobbler nodded his head.

"And did Manuel?"

He might have taken sanctuary in a legal doubt. How did he know what Manuel knew? Precisely! As before, he nodded his head.

"After supper, Boaz, you were in the shop? But you heard something?"

He went on to tell them what he had heard: the footfalls, below and above, the extraordinary conversation which had broken for a moment the silence of the inner hall. The account was bare, the phrases monosyllabic. He reported only what had been registered on the sensitive tympanums of his ears, to the last whisper of footfalls stealing past the dark wall of the shop. Of all the formless tangle of thoughts, suspicions, interpretations, and the special and personal knowledge given to the blind which moved his brain, he said nothing.

He shut his lips there. He felt himself on the defensive. Just as he distrusted the higher ramifications of finance (his house had gone down uninsured), so before the rites and processes of that inscrutable creature, the Law, he felt himself menaced by the invisible and the unknown, helpless, oppressed; in an abject sense, skeptical.

"Keep clear of the Law!" they had told him in his youth. The monster his imagination summoned up then still stood beside him in his age.

Having exhausted his monosyllabic and superficial evidence, they could move him no farther. He became deaf and dumb. He sat before them, an image cast in some immensely heavy stuff, inanimate. His lack of visible emotion impressed them. Remembering his exuberance, it was only the stranger to see him unmoving and unmoved. Only once did they catch sight of something beyond. As they were preparing to leave he opened his mouth. What he said was like a swan-song to the years of his exuberant happiness. Even now there was no color of expression in his words, which sounded mechanical.

"Now I have lost everything. My house. My last son. Even my honor. You would not think I would like to live. But I go to live. I go to work. That *cachorra*, one day he shall come back again, in the dark night, to have a look. I shall go to show you all. That *cachorra*!"

(And from that time on, it was noted, he never referred to the fugitive by any other name than *cachorra*, which is a kind of dog. "That *cachorra*!" As if he had forfeited the relationship not only of the family, but of the very genus, the very race! "That *cachorra*!")

He pronounced this resolution without passion. When they assured him that the culprit would come back again indeed, much sooner than he expected, "with a rope around his neck," he shook his head slowly.



"No, you shall not catch that *cachorra* now. But one day——"

There was something about its very colorlessness which made it sound oracular. It was at least prophetic. They searched, laid their traps, proceeded with all their placards, descriptions, rewards, clues, trails. But on Manuel Negro they never laid their hands.

Months passed and became years. Boaz Negro did not rebuild his house. He might have done so, out of his earnings, for upon himself he spent scarcely anything, reverting to his old habit of an almost miserly economy. Yet perhaps it would have been harder after all. For his earnings were less and less. In that town a cobbler who sits in an empty shop is apt to want for trade. Folk take their boots to mend where they take their bodies to rest and their minds to be edified.

No longer did the walls of Boaz's shop resound to the boastful recollections of young men. Boaz had changed. He had become not only different, but opposite. A metaphor will do best. The spirit of Boaz Negro had been a mellowed hillside giving upon the open sea, the sun, the warm, wild winds from beyond the blue horizon. And covered with flowers, always hungry and thirsty for the sun and the fabulous wind-bright showers of rain. It had become an entrenched camp, lying silent, sullen, verdureless, under a gray sky. He stood solitary against the world. His approaches were closed. He was blind, and he was also deaf and dumb.

Against that what can young fellows do who wish for nothing but to rest themselves and talk about their friends and enemies? They had come and they had tried. They had raised their voices even higher than before. Their boasts had grown louder, more presumptuous, more preposterous, until, before the cold separation of that unmov-

ing and as if contemptuous presence in the cobbler's chair, they burst of their own air, like toy balloons. And they went and left Boaz alone.

There was another thing which served, if not to keep them away, at least not to entice them back. That was the aspect of the place. It was not cheerful. It invited no one. In its way that fire-bitten ruin grew to be almost as great a scandal as the act itself had been. It was plainly an eyesore. A valuable property, on the town's main thoroughfare—and an eyesore! The neighboring owners protested.

Their protestations might as well have gone against a stone wall. The man was deaf and dumb. He had become, in a way, a kind of vegetable, for the quality of a vegetable is that, while it is endowed with life, it remains fixed in one spot. For years Boaz was scarcely seen to move foot out of that shop that was left him, a small, square, blistered promontory on the shores of ruin.

He must indeed have carried out some rudimentary sort of domestic program under the débris at the rear (he certainly did not sleep and eat in the shop). One or two lower rooms were left fairly intact. The outward aspect of the place was formless; it grew to be no more than a mound in time; the charred timbers, one or two still standing, lean and naked against the sky, lost their blackness and faded to a silvery gray. It would have seemed strange, had they not grown accustomed to the thought, to imagine that blind man, like a mole, or some slow slug, turning himself mysteriously in the depths of that gray mound—that time-silvered "eyesore."

When they saw him, however, he was in the shop. They opened the door to take in their work (when other cobblers turned them off), and they saw him seated in his chair in the half darkness, his whole person, legs, torso, neck, head,

as motionless as the vegetable of which we have spoken—only his hands and his bare arms endowed with visible life. The gloom had bleached the skin to the color of damp ivory, and against the background of his immobility they moved with a certain amazing monstrousness, interminably. No, they were never still. One wondered what they could be at. Surely he could not have had enough work now to keep those insatiable hands so monstrously in motion. Even far into the night. Tap-tap-tap! Blows continuous and powerful. On what? On nothing? On the bare iron last? And for what purpose? To what conceivable end?

Well, one could imagine those arms, growing paler, also growing thicker and more formidable with that unceasing labor; the muscles feeding themselves omnivorously on their own waste, the cords toughening, the bone-tissues revitalizing themselves without end. One could imagine the whole aspiration of that mute and motionless man pouring itself out into those pallid arms, and the arms taking it up with a kind of blind greed. Storing it up. Against a day!

“That *cachorra*! One day——”

What were the thoughts of the man? What moved within that motionless cranium covered with long hair? Who can say? Behind everything, of course, stood that bitterness against the world—the blind world—blinder than he would ever be. And against “that *cachorra*.” But this was no longer a thought; it was the man.

Just as all muscular aspiration flowed into his arms, so all the energies of his senses turned to his ears. The man had become, you might say, two arms and two ears. Can you imagine a man listening, intently, through the waking hours of nine years?

Listening to footfalls. Marking with a special emphasis of concentration the beginning, rise, full passage, falling

away, and dying of the footfalls. By day, by night, winter and summer and winter again. Unraveling the skein of footfalls passing up and down the street!

For three years he wondered when they would come. For the next three he wondered if they would ever come. It was during the last three that a doubt began to trouble him. It gnawed at his huge moral strength. Like a hidden seepage of water, it undermined (in anticipation) his terrible resolution. It was a sign perhaps of age, a slipping away of the reckless infallibility of youth.

Supposing, after all, that his ears should fail him. Supposing they were capable of being tricked, without his being able to know it. Supposing that that *cachorra* should come and go, and he, Boaz, living in some vast delusion, some unrealized distortion of memory, should let him pass unknown. Supposing precisely this thing had already happened!

Or the other way around. What if he should hear the footfalls coming, even into the very shop itself? What, then, if he should strike? And what then, if it were not that *cachorra* after all? How many tens and hundreds of millions of people were there in the world? Was it possible for them all to have footfalls distinct and different?

Then they would take him and hang him. And that *cachorra* might then come and go at his own will, undisturbed.

As he sat there sometimes the sweat rolled down his nose, cold as rain.

Supposing!

Sometimes, quite suddenly, in broad day, in the booming silence of the night, he would start. Not outwardly. But beneath the pale integument of his skin all his muscles tightened and his nerves sang. His breathing stopped. It seemed almost as if his heart stopped.

What was it? Were these the feet, there, emerging faintly from the distance? Yes, there was something about them. Yes. Memory was in travail. Yes, yes, yes! No! The footfalls were already passing. They were gone, swallowed up already by time and space. Had that been that *cachorra*?

Nothing in his life had been so hard to meet as this insidious drain of distrust in his own powers; this sense of a traitor within the walls. His iron-gray hair had turned white. It was always this now, from the beginning of the day to the end of the night: how was he to know? How was he to be inevitably, unshakably, sure?

Curiously, after all this purgatory of doubts, he did know them. For a moment at least, when he heard them, he was unshakably sure.

It was on an evening of the winter holidays, the Portuguese festival of *Menin' Jesus*.<sup>1</sup> Christ was born again in a hundred mangers on a hundred tiny altars; there was cake and wine; songs went shouting by to the accompaniment of mandolins and tramping feet. The wind blew cold under a clear sky. In all the houses there were lights; even in Boaz Negro's shop a lamp was lit just now, for a man had been in for a pair of boots which Boaz had patched. The man had gone out again. Boaz was thinking of blowing out the light. It meant nothing to him.

He leaned forward, judging the position of the lamp-chimney by the heat on his face, and puffed out his cheeks to blow. Then his cheeks collapsed suddenly, and he sat back again.

It was not odd that he had failed to hear the footfalls until they were actually within the door. A crowd of merry-makers was passing just then; their songs and tramping almost shook the shop.

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1. *Menin' Jesus*. See note 4, page 72.

Boaz sat back. Beneath his passive exterior his nerves thrummed; his muscles had grown as hard as wood. Yes! Yes! But no! He had heard nothing; no more than a single step, a single foot-pressure on the planks within the door. Dear God! He could not tell!

Going through the pain of an enormous effort, he opened his lips.

"What can I do for you?"

"Well, I—I don't know. To tell the truth——"

The voice was unfamiliar, but it might be assumed. Boaz held himself. His face remained blank, interrogating, slightly helpless.

"I am a little deaf," he said. "Come nearer."

The footfalls came halfway across the intervening floor, and there appeared to hesitate. The voice, too, had a note of uncertainty.

"I was just looking around. I have a pair of—well, you mend shoes?"

Boaz nodded his head. It was not in response to the words, for they meant nothing. What he had heard was the footfalls on the floor.

Now he was sure. As has been said, for a moment at least after he heard them he was unmistakably sure. The congestion of his muscles had passed. He was at peace.

The voice became audible once more. Before the massive preoccupation of the blind man it became still less certain of itself.

"Well, I haven't got the shoes with me. I was—just looking around."

It was amazing to Boaz, this miraculous sensation of peace.

"Wait!" Then bending his head as if listening to the winter wind, "It's cold tonight. You've left the door open. But wait!" Leaning down, his hand fell on a rope's end

hanging by the chair. The gesture was one continuous, undeviating movement of the hand. No hesitation. No groping. How many hundreds, how many thousands of times, had his hand schooled itself in that gesture!

A single strong pull. With a little *bang* the front door had swung to and latched itself. Not only the front door. The other door, leading to the rear, had closed, too, and latched itself with a little *bang*. And leaning forward from his chair, Boaz blew out the light.

There was not a sound in the shop. Outside, feet continued to go by, ringing on the frozen road; voices were lifted; the wind hustled about the corners of the wooden shell with a continuous, shrill note of whistling. All of this outside, as on another planet. Within the blackness of the shop the complete silence persisted.

Boaz listened. Sitting on the edge of his chair, half-crouching, his head, with its long, unkempt, white hair, bent slightly to one side, he concentrated upon this chambered silence the full powers of his senses. He hardly breathed. The other person in that room could not be breathing at all, it seemed.

No, there was not a breath, not the stirring of a sole on wood, not the infinitesimal rustle of any fabric. It was as if in this utter stoppage of sound, even the blood had ceased to flow in the veins and arteries of that man, who was like a rat caught in a trap.

It was appalling even to Boaz; even to the cat. Listening became more than a labor. He began to have to fight against a growing impulse to shout out loud, to leap, sprawl forward without aim in that unstirred darkness—do something. Sweat rolled down from behind his ears, into his shirt-collar. He gripped the chair-arms. To keep quiet he sank his teeth into his lower lip. He would not! He would not!



And of a sudden he heard before him, in the center of the room, an outburst of breath, an outrush from lungs in the extremity of pain, thick, laborious, fearful. A coughing up of dammed air.

Pushing himself from the arms of the chair, Boaz leaped.

His fingers, passing swiftly through the air, closed on something. It was a sheaf of hair, bristly and thick. It was a man's beard.

On the road outside, up and down the street for a hundred yards, merry-making people turned to look at one another. With an abrupt cessation of laughter, of speech. Inquiringly. Even with an unconscious dilation of the pupils of their eyes.

"What was that?"

There had been a scream. There could be no doubt of that. A single, long-drawn note. Immensely high-pitched. Not as if it were human.

"What was that? Where'd it come from?"

Those nearest said it came from the cobbler-shop of Boaz Negro. They went and tried the door. It was closed; even locked, as if for the night. There was no light behind the window-shade. But Boaz would not have a light. They beat on the door. No answer.

But from where, then, had that prolonged, as if animal, note come?

They ran about, penetrating into the side lanes, interrogating, prying. Coming back at last, inevitably, to the neighborhood of Boaz Negro's shop.

The body lay on the floor at Boaz's feet, where it had tumbled down slowly after a moment from the spasmodic embrace of his arms; those ivory-colored arms which had beaten so long upon the bare surface of a last. Blows continuous and powerful. It seemed incredible. They were so weak now. They could not have lifted the hammer now.

But that beard! That bristly, thick, square beard of a stranger!

His hands remembered it. Standing with his shoulders fallen forward and his weak arms hanging down, Boaz began to shiver. The whole thing was incredible. What was on the floor there, upheld in the vast gulf of darkness, he could not see. Neither could he hear it; smell it. Nor (if he did not move his foot) could he feel it. What he did not hear, smell, or touch did not exist. It was not there. Incredible!

But that beard! All the accumulated doubtings of those years fell down upon him. After all, the thing he had been so fearful of in his weak imaginings had happened. He had killed a stranger. He, Boaz Negro, had murdered an innocent man!

And all on account of that beard. His deep panic made him light-headed. He began to confuse cause and effect. If it were not for that beard, it would have been that *cachorra*.

On this basis he began to reason with a crazy directness. And to act. He went and pried open the door into the entry. From a shelf he took down his razor. A big, heavy-heeled stop. His hands began to hurry. And the mug, half full of soap. And water. It would have to be cold water. But, after all, he thought (light-headedly), at this time of night——

Outside, they were at the shop again. The crowd's habit is to forget a thing quickly, once it is out of sight and hearing. But there had been something about that solitary cry which continued to bother them, even in memory. Where had it been? Where had it come from? And those who had stood nearest the cobbler-shop had heard it again. They were certain now, dead certain. They could swear!

In the end they broke down the door.

If Boaz heard them he gave no sign. An absorption as complete as it was monstrous wrapped him. Kneeling in the glare of the lantern they had brought, as impervious as his own shadow sprawling behind him, he continued to shave the dead man on the floor.

No one touched him. Their minds and imaginations were arrested by the gigantic proportions of the act. The unfathomable presumption of the act. As throwing murder in their faces to the tune of a jig in a barber-shop. It is a fact that none of them so much as thought of touching him. No less than all of them, together with all other men, shorn of their imaginations—that is to say, the expressionless and imperturbable creature of the Law—would be sufficient to touch that ghastly man.

On the other hand, they could not leave him alone. They could not go away. They watched. They saw the damp, lather-soaked beard of that victimized stranger falling away, stroke by stroke of the flashing, heavy razor. The dead denuded by the blind!

It was seen that Boaz was about to speak. It was something important he was about to utter; something, one would say, fatal. The words would not come all at once. They swelled his cheeks out. His razor was arrested. Lifting his face, he encircled the watchers with a gaze at once of imploration and of command. As if he could see them. As if he could read his answer in the expressions of their faces.

"Tell me one thing now. Is it that *cachorra*?"

For the first time those men in the room made sounds. They shuffled their feet. It was as if an uncontrollable impulse to ejaculation, laughter, derision, forbidden by the presence of death, had gone down into their boot-soles.

"Manuel?" one of them said. "You mean *Manuel*?"

Boaz laid the razor down on the floor beside its work.

He got up from his knees slowly, as if his joints hurt. He sat down in his chair, rested his hands on the arms, and once more encircled the company with his sightless gaze.

"Not Manuel. Manuel was a good boy. But tell me now, is it that *cachorra*?"

Here was something out of their calculations; something for them, mentally, to chew on. Mystification is a good thing sometimes. It gives the brain a fillip, stirs memory, puts the gears of imagination into mesh. One man, an old, tobacco-chewing fellow, began to stare harder at the face on the floor. Something moved in his intellect.

"No, but look here now——"

He had even stopped chewing. But he was forestalled by another. "Say, now, if it don't look like that fellow Wood, himself. The bank fellow—that was burned—remember?—Himself."

"That *cachorra* was not burned. Not that Wood. You fool."

Boaz spoke from his chair. They hardly knew his voice, emerging from its long silence; it was so didactic and arid.

"That *cachorra* was not burned. It was my boy that was burned. It was that *cachorra* called my boy upstairs. That *cachorra* put his clothes on my boy, and he set my house on fire. I knew that all the time. Because when I heard those feet come out of my house and go away, I knew they were the feet of that *cachorra* from the bank. I did not know where he was going to. Something said to me—you better ask him where he is going to. But then I said, you are foolish. He had the money from the bank. I did not know. And then my house was on fire. No, it was not my boy that went away; it was that *cachorra* all the time. You fools! Did you think I was waiting for my own boy?"

"Now I show you all," he said at the end. "And now I can get hanged."

No one ever touched Boaz Negro for that murder. For murder it was in the eyes and letter of the Law. The Law in a small town is sometimes a curious creature; it is sometimes blind only in one eye.

Their minds and imaginations in that town were arrested by the romantic proportions of the act. Simply, no one took it up. I believe the man, Wood, was understood to have died from heart-failure.

When they asked Boaz why he had not told what he knew as to the identity of that fugitive in the night, he seemed to find it hard to say exactly. How could a man of no education define for them his own but half-defined misgivings about the Law, his sense of oppression, constraint, and awe, of being on the defensive, even, in an abject way, his skepticism? About his wanting, come what might, to "keep clear of the Law"?

He did say this, "You would have laughed at me."

And this, "If I told folk it was Wood went away, then I say he would not dare come back again."

That was the last. Very shortly he began to refuse to talk about the thing at all. The act was completed. Like the creature of fable, it had consumed itself. Out of that old man's consciousness it had departed. Amazingly. Like a dream dreamed out.

Slowly at first, in a makeshift, piece-at-a-time, poor man's way, Boaz commenced to rebuild his house. That "eyesore" vanished.

And slowly at first, like the miracle of a green shoot pressing out from the dead earth, that priceless and unquenchable exuberance of the man was seen returning. Unquenchable, after all.

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS

"Footfalls" was first published in *The Pictorial Review*, November, 1920.

1. The detective story unravels a mystery by logical processes. It has many forms, but its plot development has been fairly definitely fixed. These steps are usually present: (a) The commission of a crime; (b) suspicion cast upon an innocent person by the representatives of the law and by people generally; (c) unraveling of the mystery by the skillful detective; (d) capture or punishment of the guilty person. Have you found these elements in other detective stories you have read—in Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," in his "The Purloined Letter," or in Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories? How does "Footfalls" follow these stages of plot development?

2. In modern short stories the detective is frequently an amateur and not a professional; often he is, in fact, just the person you would least suspect of being able to solve the mystery.

3. Throughout the story all the people except Boaz are "blind," while the physically blind man is the only one who "sees." Boaz is a study in the sensations of the blind. How does his infirmity help him? The story is told from the point of view of a blind man. Is this point of view consistently held to throughout? How is the crime described as Boaz realized it? Where do you find the first reference to his power of interpreting footfalls?

4. Suspense is an important element in the detective story. From the beginning the author must put you upon the wrong track. How is suspicion thrown upon Manuel? Who first casts it upon him? How does Boaz help confirm it? Why does he raise this prejudice against his son? What means does the author take to make Campbell Wood appear innocent? How are he and Manuel contrasted? How is Wood introduced to the reader? How does the whole story turn upon the different applications of the word *cachorra* by the people and by Boaz? How does the author account for Boaz's failure to clear up the mystery before Wood returns? When did you first suspect the solution of the mystery? Why did "Footfalls" make a good moving-picture play?

5. Suspense may be heightened by the form of expression. What effect is produced by the abrupt, jerky, rapid style the

author uses? Why are there to be found many short and many incomplete sentences? Contrast Steele's style in "Down on Their Knees."

*Suggested Reading.*—*The Mystery at Blue Villa, The Sleuth of St. James' Square* by M. D. Post; *Room No. 3 and Other Detective Stories* by Anna Katharine Green; *The Silent Bullet* and *The Treasure Train* by Arthur B. Reeve; "The Pact" by Ellen Glasgow (O'Brien, 1921).

*Biographical Note.*—See the Biographical Note on page 88.



## THE STORIES AS A WHOLE

## QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. What is the time covered by the action in each of the stories?
2. In what stories is the action unfolded by the characters themselves? By the author?
3. What is the most extensively used emotional appeal?
4. What types of struggle or conflict are portrayed?
5. Which of the narratives seem most nearly true?
6. How is the attention gained at the beginning of each story? What devices are used to gain your interest at the outset?
7. In what stories do you find compactness of form? Mention those in which you find looseness of form.
8. What scenes come first into your mind with the mention of each title?
9. In what stories do you feel that the author best knows his characters?
10. In what stories is the effect of intenseness best obtained?
11. What magazines are represented by the stories in this volume?
12. Name the dominant character in each of the narratives.
13. What dominant traits of characters are represented in the chief characters of the stories?
14. What types of beginning do you find presented?
15. Are descriptions of characters brief or are they given at length?
16. What social scales are represented among the characters?
17. How far do definite traits of character determine the actions of the main characters?
18. What is the interest-arousing element in each story?
19. What characteristics of American life are represented in the stories?
20. In what sections of the country are the stories laid?

## APPENDIXES

### A. One Hundred Books of Short Stories of Our Day

#### I. ANTHOLOGIES

*Atlantic Narratives*: First Series, 1918; Second Series, 1920, Atlantic Monthly Press.

DAVIS AND GETCHELL: *Stories of the Day's Work*, Ginn and Company, 1917.

✓ HEYDRICK, B. A.: *Americans All*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1920.

✓ JESSUP, ALEXANDER: *Representative American Short Stories*, Allyn and Bacon, 1923 (contains seventy-four stories, ranging from 1780 to 1921).

✓ PENCE, R. W.: *Short Stories by Present-Day Authors*, The Macmillan Company, 1922.

Annual collections of short stories from the magazines of the year have been issued since 1915 under the title *The Best Short Stories of 1915, 1916, 1917, 1918, 1919, 1920, 1921*, etc., edited by E. J. O'Brien and published by Small, Maynard and Company. Another collection of short stories taken from the magazines is the *O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories of 1919, 1920, 1921, 1922*, etc. The stories are chosen by The Society of Arts and Sciences, and each volume contains an introduction by Blanche Colton Williams (Doubleday, Page and Company).

#### II. VOLUMES BY INDIVIDUAL AUTHORS OF OUR DAY

[No volumes of short stories issued before 1914 have been included in the following list of titles; nor has an attempt been made to make the list altogether complete. Some volumes obviously unsuited to the tastes and interests of younger readers have intentionally been omitted. A brief characterization of the collection is furnished for the majority of the volumes listed.]

ABDULLAH, ACHMED: *The Honourable Gentleman*, 1919, G. P. Putnam's Sons (stories of New York's Chinatown); *Wings*,

1920 (Eastern stories, full of fantasy, but realistic rather than romantic); *Alien Souls*, 1922, both published by James A. McCann.

BAILEY, H. C.: *Call Mr. Fortune*, E. P. Dutton and Company, 1921 (detective stories).

BERCOVICI, KONRAD: *Crimes of Charity*, Alfred Knopf, Inc., 1917; *Dust of New York*, Boni and Liveright, 1919 (life of recent immigrants in New York City); *Ghitza and Other Romances of Gypsy Blood*, Boni and Liveright, 1921, and *Murdo*, Boni and Liveright, 1923 (stirring heroic tales of Roumanian gypsy life).

BROWN, ALICE: *Homespun and Gold*, The Macmillan Company, 1920 (stories of rural and small-town life in New England, in which Miss Brown continues the local-color tradition of her section).

BRUBAKER, HOWARD: *Ranny; Otherwise Randolph Harrington Dukes*, Grosset and Dunlap, 1917 (humorous tales of American youth).

BURT, MAXWELL STRUTHERS: *John O'May*, 1918; *Chance Encounters*, 1921 (stories of higher social characters; subtle analysis of motives; spirited action), both published by Charles Scribner's Sons.

CANFIELD, DOROTHY: *Hillsboro People*, 1915; and *The Real Motive*, 1916 (these deal with secluded life in New England), both published by Henry Holt and Company; *Raw Material*, 1923 (unusual technical form), Harcourt, Brace and Company.

CHILD, RICHARD WASHBURN: *The Velvet Black*, E. P. Dutton and Company, 1921 (mystery stories).

COBB, IRVIN S.: *Local Color*, 1916; *Old Judge Priest*, 1916; *Those Times and These*, 1917; *The Life of the Party*, 1919; *From Place to Place*, 1922; *Sundry Accounts*, 1922; *Snake Doctor*, 1923, all published by George H. Doran Company.

COHEN, OCTAVUS ROY: *Come Seven*, 1920; *Highly Colored*, 1921; *Polished Ebony*, 1919; *Assorted Chocolates*, 1922; *Dark Days and Black Knights*, 1923, all published by Dodd, Mead and Company.

COLCORD, LINCOLN: *The Game of Life and Death*, 1914; *Instrument of the Gods*, 1922, both published by The Macmillan Company.

CONNOLLY, JAMES B.: *Head Winds*, 1916; *Running Free*, 1917; *Tide Rips*, 1922 (romantic stories of the fishermen of the Gloucester banks), all published by Charles Scribner's Sons.

CRAM, MILDRED: *Lotus Salad*, 1920; *Stranger Things*, 1923, both published by Dodd, Mead and Company.

DERIEUX, SAMUEL A.: *Frank of Freedom Hill*, 1922; *Animal Personalities*, 1923, both published by Doubleday, Page and Company.

DWIGHT, H. G.: *Stamboul Nights*, 1916; *The Emperor of Elam*, 1920 (romantic adventure, full of the atmosphere of the Orient), both published by Doubleday, Page and Company.

FERBER, EDNA: *Personality Plus*, Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1914; *Cheerful—By Request*, 1918 (contains the excellent story, "A Gay Old Dog"—life of a Chicago business man); *Half Portions*, 1920; *Gigolo*, 1922 (modern social conditions ironically portrayed), all three volumes published by Doubleday, Page and Company.

GALE, ZONA: *Peace in Friendship Village*, The Macmillan Company, 1919 (quiet life in a Middle Western small town; a continuation of her earlier volume *Friendship Village Love Stories*, 1912).

GELZER, MRS. JAY: *The Street of a Thousand Delights*, Robert M. McBride and Company, 1921 (Chinese stories).

GEROULD, KATHERINE FULLERTON: *Vain Oblations*, 1914; *The Great Tradition*, 1915; and *Valiant Dust*, 1922 (all three volumes contain stories of the same general type as "The Nature of an Oath"), published by Charles Scribner's Sons.

HALL, HERSCHELL: *Steel Preferred*, E. P. Dutton and Company, 1920.

HARRIS, KENNETT: *Meet Mr. Stegg*, 1920 (stories of the Far West), Henry Holt and Company.

HART, FRANCES NOYES: *Contact and Other Stories*, Doubleday, Page and Company, 1923 (romantic stories in a European setting. Contains "Contact," a popular story of the World War).

HERGESHEIMER, JOSEPH: *Gold and Iron*, 1918 (contains three novelettes—"Wild Oranges," "Tubal Cain," and "The Dark Fleece"); *The Happy End*, 1919 (stories of West Virginia mountain life), both published by Alfred Knopf, Inc.

HUGHES, RUPERT: *In a Little Town*, 1917 (Middle West village life); *Long Ever Ago*, 1918 (Irish-American characters); *Momma and Other Unimportant People*, 1920 (contains the excellent story "The Stick-in-the-Muds"). All published by Harper and Brothers.

HURST, FANNIE: *Just Around the Corner*, 1914, and *Every Soul Hath Its Song*, 1916 (the last represents the life of working girls in a city); *Gaslight Sonatas*, 1918; *Humoresque*, 1919; and *The Vertical City*, 1922 (city characters, mostly of Jewish birth). All published by Harper and Brothers.

JOHNSON, ARTHUR: *Under the Rose*, Harper and Brothers, 1920 (social satire).

KAHLER, HUGH McNAIR: *Babel*, 1921 (stories of business); *East Wind*, 1923, both published by G. P. Putnam's Sons.

LA MOTTE, ELLEN N.: *Civilization*, George H. Doran Company, 1919 (Chinese stories).

LARDNER, RING: *How to Write Short Stories, with Specimens*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924 (humorous stories written in the vernacular).

LINCOLN, JOSEPH C.: *Old Home House*, D. Appleton and Company, 1920.

MAC KAY, HELEN: *Chill Hours*, 1920, Duffield and Company.

MARTIN, GEORGE MADDEN: *Children in the Mist*, D. Appleton and Company, 1920 (negro stories).

MARSHALL, EDISON: *The Heart of Little Shikara*, Little, Brown and Company, 1922 (youth and animal stories).

MEANS, E. K.: *E. K. Means*, 1918; *More E. K. Means*, 1919; *Further E. K. Means*, 1921 (volumes of negro stories, all published by G. P. Putnam's Sons).

MONTAGUE, MARGARET PRESCOTT: *England to America*, 1920, and *Uncle Sam of Freedom Ridge*, 1920 (World War stories). Both volumes published by Doubleday, Page and Company.

O'HIGGINS, HARVEY: *From the Life*, 1919; *Some Distinguished Americans*, 1922. Published by Harper and Brothers.

POST, MELVILLE D.: *Uncle Abner*, 1918; *The Mystery at the Blue Villa*, 1919; *The Sleuth of St. James Square*, 1920; *Monsieur Jonquelle*, 1923 (mystery and detective stories). All published by D. Appleton and Company.

REEVE, ARTHUR B.: *The Treasure Train*, Harper and Brothers, 1917 (detective stories).

RHODES, HARRISON: *High Life; and Other Stories*, Robert M. McBride and Company, 1920.

RICE, A. C. and C. Y.: *Turn About Tales*, The Century Company, 1920.

ROBBINS, TOD: *Silent, White and Beautiful*, Boni and Liveright, 1920 (mystery tales).

RUSSELL, JOHN: *Where the Pavement Ends*, 1921 (stories of the South Seas); *In Dark Places*, 1923, both published by Alfred Knopf, Inc.

SHORE, VIOLA BROTHERS: *The Heritage and Other Stories*, George H. Doran Company, 1921 (Jewish life in America).

SMITH, G. A.: *The Pagan*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920.

SMITH, HARRY J.: *Cape Breton Tales*, Atlantic Monthly Press, 1921.

STEELE, WILBUR DANIEL: *Land's End*, 1918 (stories of the New England seacoast); *The Shame Dance*, 1923 (stories for the most part with a northern African setting). Both volumes published by Harper and Brothers.

STREET, JULIAN: *After Thirty*, The Century Company, 1919; *Cross-Sections*, Doubleday, Page and Company, 1923.

TARKINGTON, BOOTH: *Penrod*, Doubleday, Page and Company, 1914; *Seventeen*, Harper and Brothers, 1916; *Penrod and Sam*, Doubleday, Page and Company, 1920 (the three volumes contain stories of American youth); *The Fascinating Stranger*, Doubleday, Page and Company, 1923 (in addition to further stories of youth, this volume contains the fine story of tramp life, "The Fascinating Stranger," and the satire on the modern dance, "Jeanette").

TERHUNE, ALBERT PAYSON: *Buff: A Collie*, 1921; *Further Adventures of Lad*, 1922 (animal stories), both published by George H. Doran Company.

TRAIN, ARTHUR: *Tut, Tut! Mr. Tutt*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923.

WILEY, HUGH: *Lady Luck*, 1921 (negro life); *Jade*, 1921 (New York's Chinatown), both published by Alfred Knopf, Inc.

WILLIAMS, BEN AMES: *Thrifty Stock*, E. P. Dutton and Company, 1923.

YEZIERSKA, ANZIA: *Hungry Hearts*, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920; *Children of Loneliness*, Funk and Wagnalls, 1923.

### III. BOOKS ON THE ART AND TECHNIQUE OF THE SHORT STORY

BAKER, HARRY T.: *The Contemporary Short Story: A Practical Manual*, D. C. Heath and Company, 1916 (with directions for writing marketable stories for magazine publication).

CLARK, GLENN: *A Manual of the Short Story Art*, The Macmillan Company, 1922 (with examples).

CROSS, E. A.: *The Short Story*, A. C. McClurg and Company, 1914.

✓ ESENWEIN, J. B.: *Writing the Short Story*, Hinds, Hayden, Eldredge, 1909.

ESENWEIN, J. B., and CHAMBERS, MARY D.: *The Art of Story-Writing*, 1913, Home Correspondence School.

FOWLER, N. C.: *The Art of Story Writing*, Sully and Kleinteich, 1913.

GERWIG, G. W.: *The Art of the Short Story*, New Werner Company, 1909.

GRABO, CARL: *The Art of the Short Story*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914.

JORDAN, M. H.: *The Art of Short Story Writing Simplified*, Hannis Jordan Company, 1913.

MATTHEWS, BRANDER: *The Philosophy of the Short Story*, Longmans, Green and Company, 1901.

NEAL, R. W.: *Short Stories in the Making*, Oxford Press, 1914; *Today's Short Stories Analyzed*, Oxford Press, 1918 (a careful technical analysis of twenty-two short stories of today).

PAIN, BARRY: *The Short Story*, George H. Doran and Company, 1916.

PITKIN, W. B.: *The Art and the Business of Story Writing*, The Macmillan Company, 1913.

WILLIAMS, BLANCHE COLTON: *A Handbook of Story Writing*, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1917.

#### IV. BOOKS ON THE HISTORY OF THE SHORT STORY

✓ CANBY, H. S.: *The Short Story in English*, 1909; *A Study of the Short Story*, 1913, Henry Holt and Company.

JESSUP, ALEXANDER, and CANBY, H. S.: *The Book of the Short Story*, D. Appleton and Company, 1903 (the Introduction supplies a history of the short story in all literatures down to the beginning of the present century, with illustrative specimens).

LIEBERMAN, ELIAS: *The American Short Story*, James K. Reeve (Franklin, Ohio), 1912.

MATTHEWS, BRANDER: *The Short Story: Specimens Illustrating Its Development*, American Book Company, 1908 (see the Introduction).



SMITH, C. ALPHONSO: *The American Short Story*, Ginn and Company, 1912.

In the books named above may be found a full history of the short story as far as it had developed before the period from which the stories in the present volume have been drawn. No comprehensive treatment of the short stories of our day has been published. Critical observations and discussion of the tendencies of present-day short-story writing may be found in the Introductions to O'Brien's *Best Short Stories of 1915* and *The O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories of 1919* and the successive annual volumes of these collections. Chapters XII-XVII (pages 202-268) of Edward J. O'Brien's *The Advance of the American Short Story* (Dodd, Mead and Company, 1923) give the fullest treatment so far published of the newer generation of American short-story writers.

## B. Stories in Current Magazines

Worth-while stories may be found in the earlier and the current numbers of the following magazines:

AINSLEE'S MAGAZINE	THE LADIES' HOME JOURNAL
THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE	MCCALL'S
THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY	MCCLURE'S MAGAZINE
THE BOOKMAN	THE MUNSEY MAGAZINE
CENTURY	PICTORIAL REVIEW
COLLIER'S	THE SATURDAY EVENING POST
THE DELINEATOR	SCRIBNER'S MAGAZINE
EVERYBODY'S	SHORT STORIES
GOOD HOUSEKEEPING	WOMAN'S HOME COMPANION
HARPER'S BAZAR	WOMAN'S WORLD
HARPER'S MAGAZINE	

Read a few current issues of several of these magazines to determine the general type of story they seem to prefer. Do you find stories by any of the authors of the stories in our collection? Do you find authors contributing to several magazines? Or authors contributing a succession of stories to the same magazine?

If you have access to bound copies of earlier issues, you will be able to trace further the preferences in subject-matter and method

of treatment of different types of magazines and the contributions of short-story writers. To find the scattered stories of any author, consult the *Cumulative Book Index to Periodical Literature*, published annually by H. W. Wilson Co., New York, or the "Index of Short Stories" in the Appendix to the annual issues of O'Brien's *Best Short Stories*.

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